

The Chat of Notre Dame

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When a woman tries to escape Paris with her infant son, she is trapped by the evil Judge Papillion, who sees himself as Paris' only hope of salvation. Will the mysterious bundle she left behind be the key to his plans coming true? Or will they bring him to ruin?

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Oh Be Careful Little Hands What You Do

On a bright day in Paris, many children ran about the town square laughing and screaming. The townsfolk wove around the children as they went about their day. As the sun began to descend in the sky, a small cart with colorful streamers began playing playful music. The children slowly made their way to the little cart, elbowing their way to the front of the small crowd. A man in brightly colored clothes to match his bright orange hair smiled down at his audience.

"Gather 'round little ones," he laughed as he held up a little puppet with his right hand.

He was about to sing a little song when there came a loud ringing sound from behind him. The children all focused on the sounds in wonder.

"Have you ever heard the tale of the mysterious bell ringer of Notre Dame?" the man asked as he glanced up at the tall bell towers.

"No," a few children said quietly as the loud bells ended their reverie.

The smile on the man grew into a mischievous grin, "Then listen well, little ones. For I shall tell you the tale of the mysterious bell ringer of Notre Dame. It is a tale of a man; a man and a monster."

Many years ago gypsies lived in a state of constant fear. They lived their lives in hiding, working petty jobs during the day in hopes of earning enough money to buy their food for the day. They lived in such fear due to one man and his pursuit of cleansing the world of everything that he deemed unfit to live in his world.

A young woman cradled her child close to her breast as she walked quickly through the snow in late winter. She followed a small group of outcasts toward the Seine, where they all hoped to travel out of Paris

into the countryside and to freedom. Her child stirred and began to wail, he was becoming hungry.

"Hush little one," she cooed as she and the others neared the boat that would take them down the river. She handed her payment to one of the men of the group.

He sneered at her as he took the coins, "Shut it up, will you? He will get us all caught if he keeps this wailing up."

"I'm sorry," she whispered as she shifted the child to nurse from her, "he is just hungry." She covered the child's head as best as she could with his swaddling clothes as she boarded the boat.

The group fell into silence as they began to travel down the river in the dark of night. For once, the woman felt as though she and her son would be safe from the dangers of the large town and of the people within it. She glanced down at her son, who wrapped his fist around her fingers as he ate. The amount of love she had for this child would never falter; no matter what may happen to them, she would love him with all her heart.

Her musings were interrupted by the sound of galloping horses. An arrow shot from the darkness and caught the front of the boat. The arrow was connected to a rope which was pulled taught as soldiers began to pull the boat to the edge of the river. The frightened gypsies struggled against the men's grasp, but eventually all were in chains. A tall

figure in deep purple robes emerged on his pitch-black steed, came forward and examined the prisoners.

"Take these foul creatures to the Palace of Justice," he said as he looked down his nose at them.

"Honorable Judge Papillion," the woman with the child called as she pushed herself forward toward the man on his horse.

Judge Papillion looked down on the woman. For a moment, his eyes flashed with an emotion that only she knew. She held up her swaddled child toward the judge.

"You wish to repent and return the goods you have stolen?" Judge Papillion questioned as he looked at the bundle. He inhaled sharply when he saw the bundle move slightly. "Captain, take it from her and throw it in the river."

Her green eyes met his icy blue in absolute horror.

"NO! He is a CHILD!" a soldier approached her with his hands raised, ready to take the precious bundle from her, "You cannot take him from me! He is ou-"

"Take them from her this instant, Captain!" Judge Papillion ordered.

The woman held the child close and broke from the soldiers and into the darkness. Judge Papillion took chase.

She ran through the snow, leaving her footprints in her wake as she fled. She knew that the only chance she or her child had was to go where Judge Papillion could not arrest her.

Judge Papillion was closing in on her, she was taking small alleyways, but he knew exactly where she was going.

The large bell towers of the church loomed over the small figure running toward its steps. As she looked up, she felt as though the stone walls would swallow her up and shield her from all harm. She raced up the steps to the large wooden doors of the church. She threw herself at the door and pulled helplessly on the large handles.

"Sanctuary PLEASE give us sanctuary!" she cried as she heard the nearing horse of the judge. She turned and held her arms protectively over her child as the horse came to a stop before her.

"Surrender yourself," Judge Papillion commanded as he held out his hand, "and surrender the bundle to me."

The woman's eyes narrowed as she knelt down in the snow. She removed a small blade from a sheath on her leg and brandished it before her. "I will NEVER let you take the child from me."

Judge Papillion unsheathed his sword and pointed the blade at her, "You dare defy my orders."

"YOU WILL NOT TAKE MY SON!" she cried as she lunged at the man on his horse.

With a single swing, the woman fell to the ground. The snow beneath stained crimson. Beside her body, her bundle cried out. Judge Papillion's men arrived just as Papillion picked up the bundle.

"Throw her body in the Seine," he commanded. "She has no purpose here."

The men picked up her body and carried her away in silent obedience. Judge Papillion glanced around him before peering into the bundle. When he did so, he gasped in alarm and covered the crying child's face once more. He looked about himself in a panic before landing his gaze on a nearby well. He walked over to the side of the well and raised the child over the edge.

"Stop right there," a voice behind him called.

Judge Papillion withdrew the bundle from the well and glanced behind him, regaining his composure. A short man of the church was rushing down the stairs toward the well. "I have found an unholy demon. I am sending it back to Hell where it belongs."

"Listen well, Judge Papillion," the archdeacon said raising an accusatory finger toward the proud judge, "God has seen what you have done this night. All of Heaven is witness to your misdeed. You have shed the blood of one seeking Sanctuary and peace with God.

You threatened her family, her only child, with death and she defended herself. You have committed the crime of Cain and now you wish to commit the crime once more before the eyes of God Himself!"

"I have no guilt," Judge Papillion argued, "She was under arrest, she ran, I pursued. The bloodshed was self defence on my part. Her death is deserved. The child's death is equally deserved."

"Lie to yourself all you want," the archdeacon shouted back, "But nothing you can ever say can change what God and his Heavenly Host have witnessed this night! Notre Dame herself bears witness against you! I implore you, most Honorable Judge," he added, "do not add this child's blood to your crimes committed this night."

Judge Papillion looked down at the creature in his arms and up toward the large church before him. The building itself seemed to loom dangerously over him. He felt his stomach drop as though the whole building would swallow him and crush him. The shadow of the church pointed toward him like a accusing finger sentencing him to Hell. For the first time in his life, Judge Papillion feared for his soul.

"What must I do?" he whispered to the old man.

"Care for the child," he responded as he knelt to pray for the soul of the child's mother, "and raise it as your own."

Papillion scoffed for a moment, "You mean to tell me that I am now to be forced to care for this... " he looked down on the child once more and closed his eyes slowly, letting out a sigh, "Very well. But he shall live here in your church," he said walking toward the large cathedral.

"Here?" the archdeacon questioned, "Where would he be able to live in Notre Dame?"

"Anywhere," the judge answered, "Just as long as no one else can see this monstrosity. The belltower might be the best choice for him."

Judge Papillion left the child in the large belltower that night.

For years he would go to the tower and expect to find the monster dead from starvation, exhaustion, or neglect.

But every time he climbed the wooden stairs into the belltower, he was met with the smiling face of the monster.

"Good morning, Master," he would say as he stood from his small wooden stool. His dark clothes hung off his shoulders, revealing his pale skin. His hands were covered in heavy black leather gloves that protected the things he touched from being scratched due to his abnormally long claw-like nails. His eyes were completely green, but they sparkled with mirth whenever he saw his master. His blonde hair shone like the bright sun that he had never been able to walk under. Even worse were the two jet-black ears atop his head, which moved whenever a mouse made a sound on the other side of the room or someone began shouting in the streets below. His tail was the worst of all. It flicked about on the wooden floor as he sat and listened to his lessons with archdeacon Fu, the only other soul in all of Paris who knew he was there.

Judge Papillion would greet the monster with a nod of his head as he sat at a crudely made table. The child would rush about the room to gather plates and cups for his meal with his master. He laid the metal plate before the judge and a wooden plate before himself, likewise with the goblets.

They would share a meal together before reviewing the day's lessons. When Judge Papillion felt he did his duty as the monster's caretaker, he would stand and leave the tower.

And the monster was left alone with his thoughts and the bells of Notre Dame as his company.

His Eye is on the Sparrow

"Chat Noir?" a voice called one morning as the boy sat before a large table filled with little figures and models of the town below.

"Duusu!" the child called from where he sat, "come look at the new figure I made!"

A stone Cherub flew from a nearby window and landed beside the table. It looked at the figure with a keen eye, "You are getting much better with your details," she cooed, "The eyes are very good."

"Do you really think so?" Chat Noir asked as he took the figure back to examine it.

"Of course I think so," Duusu smiled as she looked at the other figures before her.

"Yeah," another voice called from another window, "you have a real talent with those claws of yours!" A catlike stone statue slinked in and glanced over the table. He smiled a toothy smile at Chat Noir before standing upright, "Of course, they aren't as great as *mine*, but-"

"Oh you just hush up, now," a fox-like statue scolded as she walked around the group, "Chat, you have a wonderful gift of creating."

Chat smiled at his friend before looking down at his hands. He had four long claws on each hand. He had had a horrible time with them when he was young. He tore through everything he was ever given to put on his hands. All he seemed to do is create destruction with them. But recently, he had been in more control over the destruction his claws could cause, thanks to his master, so he was happy.

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of music in the streets below.

"What's going on down there?" the cat creature asked as he glanced out over the town, "Looks like a flogging."

"No it isn't, Plagg," the fox creature scolded as she hit him over the head, "It's a festival."

"It's the Festival of Fools!" Chat cheered as he leaned out the window.

"Oh, Chat," Duusu cheered, "It's your favorite day of the whole year!"

"Trixx," Plagg called to the fox statue, "Help me find stuff to throw at the crowd!"

"That is such an immature thing to do," Trixx scolded as she rested her head on the edge of the window.

"You didn't think it was immature last year," Plagg reasoned as he pulled some bits of trash from a corner of the tower.

"Well," Trixx muttered, "last year I was still young. I'm older now... wiser."

Chat smirked at Duusu, who rolled her eyes.

"It would be really nice to be able to go down there and enjoy the festival," Chat mused as he watched a group of dancers practicing.

"You mean down," Plagg sputtered, "There?!"

Chat's face heated, thinking he said something stupid, "I-I just mean that it wouldn't be so bad seeing the festival up close."

Duusu looked at Chat and then back down at the people below.

"People might be scared of you."

"They might throw something at you."

"But if I wear a disguise?"

"What if it gets pulled off you?"

"Even I don't know about this, kid. And I'm the troublemaker."

"I think it's a great idea."

Chat, Trixx, and Plagg stared at Duusu. She looked back at them, a look of shock on her own face. But she straightened herself up and nodded, giving herself reassurance, "I think it's a great idea," she repeated. "You shouldn't have to spend your entire life locked away like this. You are twenty years old and have never talked to anyone outside this Church." She pulled a dark tapestry from a corner of the room and worked it together until she presented a long cloak. "Wear this, tie your tail around your waist, and you should be fine."

Chat's smile grew as he walked up to take the cloak. He ran his fingers over it, his eyes sparkling like grass after the rain.

But his smile disappeared in a second. He dropped the cloak on the floor and turned away.

"What's wrong, honey?" Duusu asked as she glanced from the cloak to the boy.

"Judge Papillion," he sighed as he walked over to where he kept the plates and goblets. "He would never let me go. And if he ever saw me there?" he laughed as he took the dishes to the table and sat down on his stool, "I don't even want to try to imagine the punishment I would get for such a thing."

The three statues glanced from one another as the sound of the tower door opening echoed in the stairway. Duusu sighed before leading the other two out to their perches on the side of Notre Dame.

Chat heard the door close and footsteps ascending the stairs and straightened his back. He flicked his tail as happily as he could

muster as he turned to greet his Master once again.

"Good morning, Master," he smiled as he stood from his stool. He waited for the judge to seat himself.

"Good morning, boy," the judge answered. He presented a basket of food for Chat to serve from and pulled out a book. "Let us review your lessons from yesterday."

"I would like that very much, Master," Chat said happily as he waited for the judge to eat.

The judge placed the small book before Chat and pointed to a line, Chat glanced down and began to read. Duusu had taught Chat how to read years ago, but she had continually warned him not to show off all that he knew for fear of Papillion accusing him of leaving the church. Chat fumbled uselessly over the words as Judge Papillion looked on in disgust.

Finally, he closed the book and glanced around the large and drafty room, "And what are your plans for today, boy?"

"Oh," Chat laughed nervously, "Just sitting here in my sanctuary enjoying the company of the bells and statues which cannot talk. Maybe see the festival."

Papillion slammed his hand on the table, making Chat jump from fear, "You wish to go to that horrid festival?"

"N-NO Master!" Chat fumbled, "I only thought I would observe from the tower here. I thought that maybe I could go down to the square but-"

"That festival is a cesspool for the heathens of this world! All they stand for is an abomination to humanity, the Church, and God Himself!"

"No, I decided that I wouldn't-"

"You cannot DECIDE ANYTHING, BOY! You know nothing of the world out there! I only attend because I HAVE to. I know what is best for you, boy! You cannot decide what is best for you because you do not KNOW ANYTHING!" Judge Papillion swept from the room and down the stairs. The sound of the door slamming and locking behind him echoing in the bells themselves. The sound was deafening in Chat's ears. He could hear the bells echoing the words of Judge Papillion in their own sweet voices, and it made Chat sick to his stomach.

Duusu was the first to come back inside. She found Chat sulking by a large window pointed away from the town square. She sat beside him quietly. Plagg and Trixx stood a ways off, watching.

She sighed as she looked out the window with Chat, "You know," she wrapped the cloak around Chat's shoulder when he shivered from a cold breeze, "Just because someone says they know what's best for someone else does not mean they are *right* ." She looked up at the sky above them as a flock of birds flew overhead, "Just like a human caring for a baby bird, they may think they know what the baby bird needs, but that baby bird may know that the time has come for them to test their wings and leave the nest."

"I'm allergic to feathers," Chat grumbled into his folded arms.

Duusu furrowed her eyebrows, "All I'm saying is that that judge is like a stupid person trying to care for someone they know nothing about. He might think he knows what is best, but he is not a mother bird." Duusu placed a hand on Chat's back, "What do you say, baby bird? Do you think it's time to fly?"

Chat sat up and readjusted the cloak with a small smile, "I'm still allergic to feathers," he laughed a little.

"Good thing your family is made of stone," Plagg laughed as he started making his way back across the tower, "We'd never be able to talk to you, then."

"It might have been better," Trixx whispered to Chat, "if *some* of us *were* made out of feathers."

Chat grinned as he climbed out the large window and down on the parapets below, making his way down the side of Notre Dame for the festival of fools.

3 Step By Step

Nino huffed as he stared at his map. He could have sworn he was on the correct street. His horse, Wayzz was getting tired of walking, backtracking, and retracing steps all day and was ready to lay down for a much needed rest. Each time he thought he was going to get to rest, Nino would pull him down another street.

"I leave for a few years and the entire layout of this town changes," Nino grumbled as he turned down another street that he had been down before, or maybe this one was new? They all looked the same at this point.

Nino stopped suddenly when he heard the sound of a pair of soldiers talking. They were chatting as they walked the other direction and completely ignored Nino's request for help.

"Can you tell me where the Palace of Justice is?" Nino asked as they passed, "Ah, yes," he laughed to Wayzz, "Much too busy for us."

The sound of music echoed down the streets as Nino wandered. He stopped to watch a musician, dancer, and little red dog perform in the street.

The dancer caught his eye immediately. Her black hair contrasted with her cream skin. But her blue eyes caught his own, causing the heat to rise in his cheeks. He grinned stupidly at her as she danced to the music. He jumped when the voices of the soldiers from before called out suddenly from down the road.

"Hey, you! Gypsy girl! Get out of here or be arrested!" They called out. The three ran down the road, the dog carrying the bag of money they had earned in his mouth. Coins began to drop out of the bag as it ran.

"Tikki," the girl gasped as she ran back to the fallen coins.

"Stop right there," the soldier said angrily as he grabbed at the bag in the girl's hands, "This is stolen money, no doubt."

"For your information," the woman said through gritted teeth, "I earned this. Now if you don't mind," she began to growl. Nino saw as the dog began to near the soldiers. This was not going to end well.

The girl jerked the bag out of the soldier's hands as the dog ran forward and hit the soldier with its body weight. The two took their chance to run away, leaving the soldiers behind to make chase. Nino pulled Wayzz into their path suddenly, causing the men to stop.

"You let them get away!" one soldier said angrily.

"We will need to arrest you for this," the other agreed as he pulled his sword from its sheath.

Nino pulled his cloak back to reveal the emblem on his breastplate. He had a large cross of gold which indicated his high rank as Captain in the army. He pulled his sword from his own sheath and prepared to engage in a fight, "You were saying, Captain?"

The two soldiers spluttered as they processed what had just happened, "G-G-Captain Nino?!"

Nino lowered his sword and smirked, "The Palace of Justice, please."

The two soldiers led the way toward the Palace of Justice with a very smug Nino behind them. He stopped momentarily when he saw a few stray coins on the road. He took the chance to pick them up and drop them into the hat of a beggar nearby.

As he walked away, the beggar lowered their hood to reveal the dancing girl's blue eyes following him.

Within the Palace of Justice, Nino was met by Judge Papillion.

"Welcome back from the Crusades," Papillion welcomed as the two walked about the building.

"It's good to be home," Nino replied as he followed. The sound of people's moaning and cries of pain stung his ears. "If you do not mind me asking, why was I requested to come here?"

"I am in need of someone of your skill to aid me in a quest," Papillion said with a smile that made Nino uncomfortable.

"And that would be?" Nino asked as they continued their walk to an outside corridor.

"Gypsies," he said plainly.

"Dancers and palm readers?" Nino questioned as he looked out toward the town square where various gypsies were setting up tents for the festival.

"The very basis of their lifestyle is contrary to that of God," Papillion said.

"And you need a military man to..." Nino trailed.

"The only way to weed out the sinful influence of the Church is to uproot the source of their heathen ways."

"Do you mean killing them, sir?" Nino pieced together.

"Precisely," Papillion agreed, "They are sinners who constantly drag the most holy of men into sin. Therefore, they must be destroyed. They cannot be reasoned with, they cannot be changed."

Nino shifted his weight uncomfortably.

"No matter what I try, those vile people continuously grow in numbers. I cannot complete this task the way I am now, one by one," he continued.

"What is your plan?" Nino asked quietly, his eyes still fixed on the people below.

"I intend to find their breeding grounds," Papillion said as he looked out over the entire city, "my sources say that there is a hidden refuge within the city where Gypsies hide from the law."

"Sources?" Nino prodded.

In the distance, the sound of screams of pain echoed down the halls. Judge Papillion smirked as he looked down toward the source of the sound and then back at the Captain, allowing the agonized sound answer his question.

"I see," Nino responded as he gripped his sword hilt tightly.

"I intend to rid this city of these gypsy scum within the month," Papillion smiled as he made his way toward the main entrance of the Palace of Justice. "Tell me, Captain," he stopped to look back at Nino who was still following, "have you ever been to a peasant festival?"

"Not recently," Nino answered as he fell into step behind the man, "no."

"It's a horrid affair," Papillion drolled, "But a perfect example of the type of people we will be weeding from the flock."

Nino nodded as he climbed onto his horse to follow along the Judge's carriage. The pair headed toward the town square, the lively sounds of joy and frivolity dancing on the air.

The Sweet By and By

"It's a shame Mother Camille could not come with us to the festival," a dark skinned girl hummed to herself as she placed a tiara on her head. Her mahogany hair laid in a curly mess down her neck, which was perfect for fitting the delicate tiara on. She adjusted her dark blue and white dress before spinning around her changing room.

"She never really stays around for very long," another woman sighed as she sat lazily on a chair.

"Marinette, you need to get ready," the other woman scolded as she grabbed a brush and began to fuss with the other's hair.

"I have plenty of time, Alya," she responded as she leaned into the brush in retaliation to a particularly nasty knot found in her black hair.

"Yeah, yeah," Alya scoffed as she tied her hair up with a long, black sash, "Just don't miss your cue."

Marinette stood and unwrapped the sash from her waist, "I won't, I'll see you later."

Alya smiled and left the tent. She did not watch where she was going and stepped right in front of Wayzz, who reared back and nearly knocked Nino off.

"Watch it!" Nino shouted as he steadied himself and the horse.

"You watch where you're going, metal brain!" Alya spat back. She stopped dead in her tracks when one of the Judge's personal guards came up to her.

"Is there a problem here, Captain?" He said as he pointed a spear toward Alya. She gasped and took a step back.

"No! No, not at all," Nino said as he climbed down from Wayzz and in the path of the guard. "I drove my horse into her path. It is fine." Nino took the chance to glance back at her, only to find the space behind him empty.

Alya had slipped away. She held her hand to her chest to feel her heart. It was beating fast. She took a few deep breaths and continued her trek toward the stage.

The whole town was in an uproar. People were shouting in the streets, children were running wild, tents were lining the streets. Each tent had a different kind of attraction for townsfolk to enjoy ranging from palm reading, puppet shows, games, and dancers. Judge Papillion walked down the main road toward a special seat just for him near the main stage. Some of the venders avoided eye-contact as he passed. He took note of every stall with suspicious people within as he passed.

Nino could not stop smiling. He enjoyed seeing the people so happy.

He stopped to enjoy a small play being put on by a small band of actors. His attention was pulled away by the sound of lively music. He looked down the road to where Papillion was getting situated in his honorable seat. He sat before a large stage where a group of dancers in bright colored costumes were swaying to the music. One dancer in a dark blue and white dress caught his eye. She swung her hips and waved her arms rhythmically, almost hypnotically. He walked quickly toward the stage, ignoring everything else around him. He only pulled his eyes away when he accidentally bumped into a tall figure in a dark cloak.

"Excuse me," he apologised as he regained his footing.

"N-no no, I'm sorry, forgive me, please," the voice beneath the cloak pleaded, causing Nino to return his attention to the figure.

"You don't need to apologise," Nino responded while raising his hands defensively, "I was distracted by the beautiful dancers. Aren't

they just lovely?"

The figure turned and, supposedly, looked toward the stage, "Yes they are."

Nino smiled and continued his trek to the stage, "Enjoy the festival!"

Chat watched as the guard walked away from him. His heart was beating so hard from the fright of being found out that he could not hear his parting words. He rushed between the nearest tents in hopes of calming himself down.

As if the Fates themselves were determined to watch him be found out, he tripped over a pile of supplies for the vender and fell forward into another tent. He grasped for something to keep him from falling, only for the flimsy fabric to give from his weight. He landed in a heap in the tent as a pile of fabrics, cloak, tail, and was that glitter?

"HEY!" a female voice shrieked as he landed. Chat felt dizzy as he pried himself from the mess he had just made.

"I'm sorry! I'm so so SO sorry!" Chat whined as he tripped over the fabrics helplessly, "I can't- I just-"

"Let me help you!" The voice offered as he felt hands begin to pull at the fabrics.

Chat pulled back desperately trying to cover his head and face, but the other person was strong and managed to free him easily. Chat tried to cover his ears with his hands, but the person was lifting him up by the elbows and it was very hard to keep himself covered.

"There," she said as she kicked the fallen curtain away from his feet. She seemed to not notice the tail... or the ears... or how desperate he was to have his hood over his head. "No harm done?" She smiled at him and Chat felt his stomach lurch at the thought of what she would say when she saw his state. "Great!" she began to usher Chat

from the tent gently, "I'd love to have you stay, kitty, but I have to finish getting dressed."

Only then did Chat notice that the woman before him was currently wrapped in a thin robe. Her hair was tied up with a long black sash and she wore a lovely golden tiara. Her bluebell eyes sparkled as she giggled at him. He was staring.

With a final shove, he was back outside. His heart was beating rapidly, but for a different reason this time. And so, once again, he failed to hear her parting words.

"By the way, I love the costume, kitty," she called out as she closed the curtain behind him.

5 Amazing Grace

Chat covered his head protectively once more and continued to walk with the sudden flow of people toward the main stage.

The woman with mahogany hair was center stage spinning on pirouette. The ribbons and skirt of her dress flowed like a dark blue and white river about her. She stopped suddenly a large cloud of smoke consumed her, in her place was a flash of bright red. The girl that Chat recognized from the tent danced about the stage with a large grin on her face.

She lowered herself into a split and made eye contact with Chat. She offered him a wink and a smirk before leaping off the stage toward Judge Papillion. She sat on his lap and wrapped her scarf around his neck. She motioned to kiss him before pulling his hat over his face and running away, laughing.

Papillion lifted the hat back off his brow to reveal a furious expression, which caused the crowd to laugh uproariously. His face grew red in both embarrassment and anger as he sat back in his seat.

A grinning man with bright red hair and a brightly colored outfit addressed the crowd, "Here it is, the moment you've been waiting for!"

The crowd began to elbow one another excitedly as people began to force their way up to the front of the stage area.

"The time has come for us to crown the King of Fools!" he shouted as the dancers began to usher the people in front of the stage onto the stage in a line. Chat had been pushed so far forward, his nose was practically level with the floor of the stage.

"You remember last year's King?" the man motioned to a large and disgusting man being paraded toward the stage. He happily waved to the cheering crowd, reveling in the attention that he did not receive any other day of the year. Chat almost felt sorry for the man, but his musings were interrupted by his arms being lifted up on their own as he was pulled onto the stage by the woman from the tent and the mahogany haired dancer.

"Make a face for the crowd that is truly ugly and frightening! We shall see who will become our new King of Fools!" the man cheered as he signaled for the two dancers to begin presenting the possible candidates.

One by one, their masks and hoods were pulled from their faces as they presented their best features for the crowd. One by one, the crowd booed their attempts and they were knocked off the stage in a humorous fashion.

Chat watched as the women come closer and closer to him. He would have climbed off the stage and hidden in the crowd, but the crowd was so wild that every time he tried, they pushed him back up onto the stage. His tail had been stepped on multiple times as well.

Finally, the woman in red stood before Chat, she reached out and pulled the cloak off of his neck, revealing him to the entire world... and Judge Papillion.

There he stood as the crowd grew silent. His black ears flattened against his head as he felt himself shrink before their gaze. His tail wrapped around his ankles nervously.

"What is it?" a woman called out, clearly frightened.

"Is it a demon?" another voice called.

"Is that not the bell ringer who is hidden in Notre Dame?!" Chat flinched as his identity was revealed. He turned to look toward Judge Papillion, but instead he saw those bluebell eyes.

She stared at him in a way that made his stomach ache. Pity. He knew that was a look of pity. She looked at him like he was some pathetic stray who had just been found by a group of school boys, and that hurt him. But the gaze that made him slink back in fear was that of Papillion. His gaze was not pity, it was not even the look he gave Chat when he was disappointed in him.

This was a look of pure rage. Chat had gone against his master's wishes. His heart began to beat so hard he could not hear the sound of the man who had been leading the whole show.

"Do not panic!" he said as he held out his hands to calm the crowd, "we asked for the most hideous and frightful face, and we have received it! Behold! Our new King! The Bell Ringer of Notre Dame! What is your name?"

Chat focused on the face now directly in front of him, "Ch-Chat Noir?"

"King Chat Noir!" he shouted as a crown was placed over his ears. Chat felt numb as his body was lifted and presented to the world. He was paraded down the streets as the people cheered. As he went the flashes of colors and faces overwhelmed him. He lost himself to the energy and emotions of the people and began to wave and smile dumbly as people shook his hand or kissed his head. Finally, he was brought back to the town square where he was placed on the stockade. People threw flowers and streamers in the air as Chat raised his hands triumphantly.

Nino clapped for the creature being paraded about the city, but stopped when he saw the judge's face. One of the guards was summoned to the judge's side for a moment before he and another guard approached the creature.

Nino watched in horror as a flash of red flew into Chat Noir's face. The rotten fruit exploded on impact and left its juice to flow down his face and beneath his shirt. Chat held his hand to his face and looked up in horror as the crowd's cheers shifted quickly to mockery.

A few other guards began to loot the garbage and shops in order to throw rotten food and other bits of garbage at the man they had just praised. Chat winced as the food hit him again and again.

Marinette and Alya looked at one another in an unspoken question as to what was going on outside their tent. Marinette jumped to her feet when she heard an agonized cry of pain from the stockade and ran to the front of the tent. She looked out to see the man she revealed to the whole town being pelted with food and rocks. He was hunched over, protecting his face. Someone reached up to him and grabbed his tail, forcing him to fall on his face.

She did not think it possible, but matters only got much worse from there.

Chat shouted at the people around them when he was pulled down, lifting himself to stand on his feet once more. His gloves dropped to the ground as he swiped viciously at the people who mocked him. The guards took that as their chance to begin throwing ropes over him. Chat fought back, but was overpowered by the cruel men. His hands and feet were bound to a spinning wheel and spun around, watching the faces of the crowd blur into one single mocking face.

"Master!" he called out as the flash of dark purple entered his sight for a moment. "Master, please!" If anyone would save him, it would be the same person who saved him when he was so young. "Help me!"

Judge Papillion laced his fingers, refusing to make eye-contact. He would not be tied to this monster. He refused.

"Sir," Nino said as he stared helplessly at the man tied down, "permission to end this cruelty?"

Papillion curled his lip in disgust, "No, Captain. A lesson needs to be learned here."

Nino was about to argue the command when the sounds of the crowd died almost immediately.

Marinette had walked slowly through the crowd, eyes forever fixed on the blonde man before her. She ascended the steps carefully as the spindle came to a stop. She knelt down beside the man and placed a gentle hand on his back. She felt his body tense to the contact and retreated her hand for a moment.

"I'm so sorry," Marinette whispered as she took her sash from her waist and began to wipe his face clean. "None of this was supposed to happen."

Chat held in his sobs as she wiped his face clean.

"You there," Papillion's wicked voice called out in the silence of the crowd, "get away at ONCE."

"Yes, your Honor," Marinette conceded, "just as soon as I free this man."

Papillion's eyes were alight with an immensely hot fire, "Get down this instant!"

Marinette glared defiantly at the man as she pulled a knife from a pouch on her leg and cut the ropes as fast as she could, allowing Chat to stand once more. She held her knife tight in her fist as she returned her gaze to Papillion.

"You insolent little-" Papillion hissed as he stood from his seat.

"You treat this man the EXACT same way to treat my people!" Marinette shouted angrily.

"What?" Papillion questioned.

"You talk about making the world pure again and bringing God back to this dark time, but you IGNORE those who come to you for help!" Marinette shouted, motioning to the crowd as she spoke.

"Sinners such as you-" Papillion started.

"Deserve to have a second chance! Is that not what YOUR GOD teaches you? Does He not say you are to care for the poor, the widowed, and the FATHERLESS?!" Marinette pointed an accusing finger at Papillion.

Papillion stepped back defensively. He had had enough. "Seize her!" he shouted angrily to his guards.

Nino bit his lips before signaling for the troops to advance toward the single woman on the stockade.

Marinette's eyes seemed to glow a wild sky-blue as she counted the guards around her. "So there is ten of you and only one of me..." she pulled some beads from a pocket and held out her hand, "I guess the only thing I have left to do is..." she glanced at Chat and winked mischievously. She dropped the beads and disappeared into a puff of smoke.

The guards arrived just in time to see the smoke clear, only Chat remained to greet them.

"Hello, boys," Marinette greeted as she sat fiddling with a puppet from the puppeteer's booth. The puppeteer smirked at the guards as they came toward her, knocking the overhanging tarp down just as Marinette snuck out the back, capturing five of the men inside the tarp. Marinette took the chance to run around the tent with her dog, Tikki while trailing a rope behind them, tying them up. The other five guards approached just as Marinette finished. She ran into the large crowd and into a group of dancers who used their scarves and sashes to cover the men's eyes. Marinette took the hand of one of the men on stilts and climbed on top of the large stage. She untied one of the main poles as she was surrounded and fell with it in front of the judge. She bowed low, causing Nino to chuckle, and then dropped another bead, creating a large cloud of smoke. All that remained was little Tikki, who barked happily as the guards jumped

onto the platform and efficiently knocked Papillion over. Tikki took her chance to exit and run off into the crowd.

Marinette and her cohorts were nowhere to be found.

Papillion pulled himself from the pile of men and looked around him. The people were laughing hysterically. He turned his gaze to Chat Noir, who was laughing to himself at the whole ordeal. He stopped when he saw his master's face.

Quickly, he grabbed his gloves from the ground and slunk back into the darkness. The clouds grew darker than usual and light water droplets fell to the ground. Chat pulled the large doors of his sanctuary open and snuck inside, the sound of the crowd dying out as he rushed inside the stone walls.

Archdeacon Fu confronted Chat at the stairs leading toward the belltower.

"What happened?" he asked as he observed the stains on his clothes and the tears in his eyes.

"Master was right," Chat hiccuped, "the world *is* a dark and cruel place, and I never want to go back."

Fu moved aside as the poor creature ascended his stairs and into his quiet oasis once more. He sighed and rubbed his head as the sound of the door closing him in forever echoed through Notre Dame.

"If only," Fu prayed as he walked toward the large foyer, "if only You could send him an angel to protect him from the cruelty that is the world we live in."

Healing Rain

The rain had caused the number of people attending the festival to diminish to only a few here or there. The sudden manhunt for Marinette also put the whole town into a foul mood as well. Nino, under the orders of Papillon, was organizing the search. He had just ordered a small group to look down by the river when a figure caught his eye. It was a short figure with a long, dark cloak about them. They walked mysteriously like someone who was hiding something. Ninio decided to follow on his own.

Marinette pushed the door of the church open and inched her way in, Tikki leapt from her arms and began to sniff the room. Marinette was in complete awe of the large church. The sound of the prayers of many seemed to linger in the air itself, making it heavy with wants and needs that could never be fulfilled on earth.

Lines of candles lit for those who had passed on created beautiful dancing shadows on the walls. Each one was as graceful and elegant as any gypsy in the streets. Marinette smiled as she took the chance to light one on her own.

"Have you come to pray for those who have moved on?" the voice startled her.

"Oh," Marinette fumbled, "no, I was just..." she looked from the man and back to the candles, "I was just hoping to find someone here."

"If you mean the bell ringer," the man said sternly, "you will not find him here."

Marinette frowned, "It's all my fault, you know."

The man walked up beside her and listened.

"I was the one who thought to bring him on stage," she ran her finger quickly over the flames before her, "I was the one who pulled off his

cloak."

"You know," the man said with a soft smile, "most people wait to confess until *after* they are in the confessional."

Marinette smiled at the comment, but frowned once again, "None of that cruelty would have ever happened to him if I had just let him be. I had no idea that he was... well..."

"Yes," the man agreed solemnly, "unfortunately, mankind is one of the cruelest things on this planet."

"Ha!" Marinette scoffed, "My people have been suffering by the hands of mankind for as long as I can remember. Why do people have to treat one another in such a cruel way just because they are a little different?"

The man nodded and walked past her, he led the way into the main sanctuary where dozens of people knelt in prayer, "I ask myself the same thing. Mankind is social, they want to be with one another. And when the loudest voice says that a certain thing is right or wrong, in order to feel welcomed, others will join in."

Marinette furrowed her eyebrows, thinking of how quickly the crowd turned into a mob from such a little incident.

"And so," the man continued, "the truth becomes distorted by the raging masses. And mankind cannot help but follow where the truth seems to lead. Unfortunately, that truth leads to a dangerous slope of needless laws and cruel words. Soon," he knelt before the altar and crossed himself, "humans no longer recognize other humans, no matter the size, age, color, or faith."

Marinette stood behind the man, staring up at the large cross, "How can we stop the world from slipping down the slope?"

"What is important is to remember that no matter how far down the slope someone has gone," the man said turning his head to look at

her, "they are never too far down the slope that they cannot be saved."

Marinette looked down in thought as the man began to pray. She took that as her chance to step away and figure things out on her own for a moment. She stopped to look out a window to see if the men were still looking for her. The rain was pouring. A guard walked past the window and Marinette took a few steps back. As she did so, the image on the stained glass became more clear. So many images of people praying stood before her.

Marinette took the moment to touch the delicate pane, it was cold to the touch, but she kept her hand there.

"I don't know if you can hear me, God, or if you are even really there to hear me, a lowly gypsy. I-I am nothing compared to the priests and deacons of this beautiful church, but... You were a carpenter... My people are hurting. They are starving, they are cold, and they are in desperate need of your help. They are powerless against Judge Papillion and I can't stand to see them in such hurt. And the man... he was hurting just as much as the rest of us. Please, God if you can hear me, all I want is for you to help my people. Help them where they can't help themselves. Please, that is all I ask of You.

Help them."

Chat had been sitting in his tower silent since he spoke to Fu. He had cleaned up and was staring at his model of the town. It was the same town with the same faces that had laughed at him.

"Chat," Duusu said as she placed a hand on his shoulder, "Oh honey please listen to me."

Chat only turned his eyes away from her. He had been humiliated and Duusu was to blame. She had told him to go, she had given him hope. And now he only wanted to live the rest of his days in solitude with nothing but his bells, and his thoughts. Duusu sighed and

looked toward the other two statues. They nodded and stepped in, allowing Duusu to move away for a moment.

"Chat, kid," Plagg sat on Chat's other side, "no one could have seen this coming."

"I did," Chat grumbled.

"But," Trixx laid her chin across from Chat, "It wasn't all bad."

"I was tied down on the stockade," Chat frowned at her.

Trixx leaned back awkwardly, "Well... I mean, yeah, but..."

"What about the girl with the hair?" Plagg grinned.

"What about her?" Chat scoffed as he hid his face in his arms.

"She seemed to like you," Trixx offered.

"And did you see that escape? Flawless!" Plagg elbowed Chat lightly with a wink.

"Yeah," Chat's frown deepened, "she's probably miles away from here."

"Or she's looking for you downstairs," Duusu interrupted as she returned to the group.

"What?" Chat questioned as he sat up.

"That dancing girl with the hair," Duusu clarified, "she's downstairs looking for you."

Chat stood up quicker than he had meant to and ran down the stairs. He opened the door slightly to peer out into the foyer.

Sure enough, there she stood with her little red dog. She sat in the light of the candles, lost in her thoughts. Chat was about to open the

door when a voice caught both of their attention.

"Didn't think you were the type to frequent churches," Nino smirked as he came toward her.

Marinette stood to face the man, a look of disdain on her face, "You have a lot of nerve making an assumption about me."

Nino lowered his head and raised his arms in defeat, "Valid. Might as well start off on the right foot and not assume your name is actually Ladybug: the Finest Dancer in all of France."

Marinette smirked at the title, "Yeah, it's not really that."

"May I ask what it is?" Nino extended a hand. He lunged back when Tikki growled and took a nip at his wrist.

"Ah," he said as he put some distance between the two of them, "Animal sidekick... must be royalty."

"Tikki doesn't like soldiers who invade my personal space," Marinette grinned.

"Wide personal bubble," Nino commented, "either way, can I please know your name?"

Marinette, impressed and slightly annoyed by his persistence, gave up, "Marinette."

"Beautiful name," Nino complimented as he bowed, "My name is Captain Nino Lahiffe. I am pleased to- yowch!"

Tikki took her chance to nip at Nino's nose when he bowed and managed to brush it with her teeth, causing him to jump back again in surprise.

"Cheeky little thing, isn't she?" Nino grumbled as Marinette laughed.

"Why won't you arrest me?" Marinette asked suddenly.

Nino blinked at her before motioning around him, "You're in the house of God. Anyone who seeks refuge in this holy place deserves a chance to make things right."

"You are definitely not like the other guards," Marinette smiled as she summoned Tikki to her side.

"I'll take that as the highest of compliments," Nino laughed. "Why *are* you here?"

Marinette hesitated, "I'm looking for-"

"Good work, Captain," the sound of Papillion's voice made everyone in the area jump in surprise. "You've cornered her."

Nino looked from the woman to Papillion and back again, "Claim sanctuary," he whispered.

"You," Marinette whispered back through gritted teeth, "you set me up."

"I can't help you unless you claim sanctuary," Nino resoned.

"Arrest her, Captain!"

"I'm sorry, your honor," Nino said, turning back to the judge, "she has claimed Sanctuary."

"Then drag her by the hair outside and arrest her!" Papillion commanded. Marinette took a few steps back, out of Nino's reach, her face paled.

"You will do no such thing," Archdeacon Fu interjected, walking between the two groups and holding up his hand toward the judge. "Don't worry, child. Judge Papillion learned a long time ago not to consider the holiness of God a matter to be trifled with."

Marinette stood silently as Papillion begrudgingly ordered his men to retreat. Nino followed the men out. She did not notice Judge

Papillion sneak into the shadows as they turned to go their separate ways.

Suddenly, Marinette felt her right hand being twisted painfully behind her back. The heat from the body behind her became an uncomfortable breeze by her neck.

"Listen well, Gypsy," Papillion hissed, "One step out of this building, and you will be mine!"

"You sick monster," Marinette retaliated as she pulled away from him. But his grip was too tight. She felt a chill down her spine as his body suddenly got closer. She could hear him inhaling the scent of her hair. "What are you doing?" she growled confidently, turning her head to look toward him.

He hesitated for a moment, "I was just imagining what a rope would look like on that pretty neck of yours."

She didn't buy that for a second, she elbowed him as hard as she could and pulled free, "I know what you were thinking," she curled her lip in disgust.

"Typical," Papillion said as he stood tall above her, "A Gypsy trying to put such... *unholy* thoughts in a righteous mind."

"You disgust me," Marinette hissed as she walked backward toward the sanctuary.

"I shall see you again soon," Papillion raised a dismissive hand as he walked away, "gypsies never do well in stone walls." He turned to close the doors behind him, giving Marinette one final look which made her want to throw up. The sound of a door to her side moving caught her attention almost immediately.

"Who's there?" she asked as she neared the door. The sound of footsteps retreating made her curiosity overtake her. She flung open

the door to find a long flight of stairs before her. "The belltower," she grinned to herself as she chased the distant sound.

You're the One Who Holds the Stars

Chat took the stairs in twos as he ran from the one person in the world who he was scared the most to see at that point.

"Wait!" Marinette cried as she climbed those same stairs as quickly as she could, "I want to talk to you!"

Chat reached the top landing and nearly collided with Duusu.

"What are you doing? Stop running!" she cried as she tried to slow him down.

"She might catch up!" Chat panted as he struggled out of Duusu's grip. Her hands lost their grip on the fabric of his shirt and he went down hard on the ground.

"I just wanted to tell you that I am really sorry about today!" Marinette panted as she reached the landing. She looked up to see Chat sprawled in a heap on the ground, grumbling, and a few odd statues near the top of the stairs. Her eyes focused solely on Chat as he stood up, this time, she really looked at him.

She watched as Chat's tail flicked agitatedly as he untangled his feet from some ropes. His ears laid back on his head as he hissed at the materials to get off of him. That's when she was able to really look at his face. His eyes shone a brilliant green, encircled by blackened skin, almost like a mask. His hands were hidden behind large black leather gloves. His clothes were frayed, but seemed sturdy. His hair was a shining golden color, like the sun on a summer day.

"I-I-I wh-what, uh... n-no! You shouldn't be here!" Chat stumbled helplessly.

Marinette stood a good distance away, but refused to leave, "Please let me apologize for earlier today?"

"Wh-wh- No!"

"No?" Marinette repeated, slightly hurt.

"I'm the one who should apologize," Chat shouted as he circled her nervously.

"You?" Marinette questioned as she followed his path, "But I'm the one who pulled you onto that stage! I'm the one who revealed you in front of everyone! It's all my fault you were..."

"I deserved it," Chat hid behind a pillar, refusing to make eye contact.

"No you don't!" Chat jumped back when he saw Marinette holding onto the other side of the pillar. Her bright blue eyes were filled with a strong emotion he did not understand. "No one deserves that kind of treatment!"

"No, you don't understand," Chat defended, "Master told me never to go down there! And he was right! He was only trying to protect me from the people who would see me for what I am!"

Marinette paused, she watched as Chat ran a gloved hand through his hair as he sighed. "What are you?" she asked quietly.

Chat stood tall, raising either arm as if to present himself to her, "I'm a monster."

Marinette bit her lip, but sat down on a pile of wood and looked at him. Chat took that as a signal to elaborate.

"I was cursed. When I was cursed, I don't know. My mother, she," he let out a deep breath, "She was a witch. She cursed me at some point in hopes of me being taken away and killed. Master found me and saved me before anyone could kill me. He said the witch killed herself when she found out I was still alive. The very thought of me being in this world and being connected to her was to devastating." Chat sat on the floor opposite of Marinette, his face was extremely

sad. "That's why I should never have gone out there today. If Judge Papillion is ever found out to be tied to me in any way..." Chat held his knees and hid his face from her.

"He'd be proud," Marinette finished for him.

"What?" Chat questioned, looking up at her. Marinette was no longer sitting before him, but had found his model of the town.

"He'd be proud," she repeated, holding up the figure of the baker, "He'd want to show you off to the world. You are so observant. Look at this model you have made! And you are careful and delicate. No knife I have ever seen is able to carve these details so well, surely your sharp claws that I got to see earlier did this fantastic work. You are kind hearted; no man in all of Paris can say such nice things about that man. You are obviously patient and forgiving. I would have burned this whole thing to the ground after what they did to you." Marinette turned back toward the cat creature with a smile on her face, "You are no monster."

Chat blushed at the compliment, "But look at me!" He held out his hands as if they bore testament to his fate.

Marinette took his right hand in her own and examined it, "Well, I have read hundreds of palms," she hummed as she looked closely at the lines on his hands, "so let's see what we've got." She continued to hum to herself as she traced the lines with her index finger, causing Chat's skin to practically melt at the touch, "long lifeline, shy, hmm," she frowned, "do you have something I can write on and with?"

Chat leapt to his feet and gathered the supplies more enthusiastically than he cared to admit to. Marinette took his hand and traced around it, then added lines to the palm.

"You see," Marinette explained as she drew the lines, "This line here, is the lifeline. It is long in your case, indicating that you will have a long life. Here is the line that shows your personality, it is not as

defined as other lines, showing your shyness," Chat blushed again, pulling his hands closer to his stomach, "But if you were truly a monster or other sort of wicked being," she drew a sharp and jagged line across the top of the palm below the fingers, "you would have a line like this." She put the pen she wrote with down and took Chat's hand again, "I don't see any line like that on you."

Chat's eyes widened as he looked at his hand in awe. The smile that spread across his face made her heart melt with joy.

She then laid her hand next to the paper. "Tell me what you see."

Chat looked down at her palm, careful not to touch it, "I see a line like mine, but it fades away a lot sooner than mine does."

"Some say that that means I simply have a short lifespan. Camille, another Gypsy I know, says that it means my lifespan is destined to return in an unexpected way."

"What does that mean?" Chat asked as he looked up at her face.

"I'm guessing it means I will get to come back in another life," she smiled.

Chat smiled back before looking at her palm, "This line is curled up back toward your pinkie. What does that mean about your personality?"

"It means I am a happy person, it goes up like a smile," she made an upward curve motion in front of her mouth, smiling as she did so, "I am a positive person."

Chat's smile grew wider before looking back at her open palm. He honestly had no idea what else to look for.

"Do you see any?" Marinette asked, pulling his attention away again.

"What?"

"Monster lines?" she clarified.

Chat looked from the chart back to her palm and back once more, "No. But you are very kind, not like other gypsies."

Marinette frowned, "You cannot judge someone by what their profession is. And you *should* not judge people by what they look like. I have found more monster lines in people who are not gypsies than people who are."

Chat looked up in surprise, "You have? How can that be? Master says that-"

"Judge Papillion is just a man," Marinette shouted, "and he has blinded you from the truth!"

Chat looked up at her in a way that made her heart sink.

"But he is the only one who cares for me," Chat whispered, looking away.

Marinette reached out and placed her hand on Chat's cheek. She turned his face toward hers, the tears in her eyes stung. "Even the most wicked people can do kind things."

Chat lowered his head from her hand, silent.

Marinette sighed before standing to look out toward the sunset. "I'm sorry. I did not mean to upset you. If you don't mind, I would like to stay here in the tower with you."

"What?" Chat looked up, he thought that after her outburst she would leave him alone just as Papillion would. He thought he had made her angry.

"I've been given Sanctuary here," Marinette smiled sadly at him, "Though the sooner I can leave, the better. Poor Tikki can't live here for long. She likes to travel."

Chat noticed the little red dog sitting near the statues. For a moment he thought that she was engaged in some sort of silent conversation with his statue friends. "I'll set up a place for you," he said as he stood.

As the sun set, Chat collected some blankets and pillows to create a comfortable bed for her. He climbed the arches and beams to hang curtains around her space. When the sun set he lit some candles and went to find Marinette.

He found her outside on the top of the church. She and her dog were gazing at the stars as he climbed to meet them.

"It's beautiful up here," Marinette commented as he joined her.

"Twenty years I've been up here and I never get tired of seeing it," Chat smiled as he looked skyward.

"You can't be much older than I am," Marinette laughed.

"I've been here since I was a baby," Chat hummed as he laid on his back.

Marinette stared at him, "You have been up in this tower since infancy? Who nursed you? Who cared for you? A baby needs constant attention!"

Chat sat up again and looked at her, "I don't really know. He said that the Archdeacon was the only other person who knew about me."

"How in the world did you survive?"

Chat held his tongue, he didn't want to say the for as long as he can remember the statues of Notre Dame came to life and cared for him.

"So you're telling me that Papillion spent hundreds of hours in this tower with you caring for you? That can't be possible!"

Chat shrugged, "I guess he really didn't want me to die."

Marinette stared at him to the point that he got very uncomfortable.

"It's late, I think we should go to sleep now. Besides," he began to descend toward the window below, "I want you to meet the bells in the morning sun!"

"Meet the bells?" Marinette scoffed as she followed him.

Marinette held Tikki close that night as her mind raced with the possibilities of what may happen to her now within the stone walls of Notre Dame.

Chat sat on by a window as he worked a small piece of wood in his hands.

"She's nice," Duusu commented as she sat quietly next to him.

"Shh!" Chat hushed, "Don't let her hear you."

"Why not?" Duusu giggled, "She has seen quite a lot today. I'm sure living statues wouldn't scare her one bit."

"You don't know that," Chat scolded as he continued to whittle the wood.

Duusu only smiled before walking back to his bed. She fluffed some pillows and pulled the blankets back. She looked down on the bed as her mind replayed precious memories, memories she held dear. She remembered when Chat was first placed in the tower. Plagg and Trixx had sat around the little bundle, utterly baffled as to how to keep the child alive through the night. When she had seen them, she took total responsibility for him. She made sure he was safe, warm, and fed from that day on.

And every day she would watch Papillon from the shadows. He would come up with a bottle of cream and a wash bin as a means to appease Archdeacon Fu below. He would begrudgingly care for Chat and then leave him alone once more.

Archdeacon Fu, when he had time, would come up and talk to Chat. He would sit and play with him, talk with him, and make sure he was dressed well enough.

When he would leave, she, Trixx, and Plagg would take over. They would continue to play and care for him. From the moment he could fully understand, they began to teach him. He read books, he memorized poetry and passages of Scripture, he was especially good with his hands. He had been taught how to use his hands almost constantly by the three. They seemed to be the only thing he could touch without leaving any lasting damage. He worked hard, and learned how to ring the bells with ease. He had watched the bellringer before him pull the ropes with equal amounts of care and power. By the age of twelve, he was able to pull the ropes of the bells with that same ease.

He was a very good child, but there were times when he would become angry, frustrated, or sad. At these times, he would seem to lose himself. He would sit crouched on the floor, head in his hands, breathing heavily. If upset any further, he would lose himself completely. It seemed as though whatever curse was placed on him was tied directly to his anger. When provoked enough, he would grow long, black hair all around his body. His claws would destroy anything he touched. His teeth would become incredibly sharp. He was practically a ferocious lion, lurking in the shadows of the tower.

The only way to bring him back seemed to be remorse. The first time he got that angry was when he revealed to Papillion that the statues talked to him. The judge was furious with him and said he was a fool for coming up with such a ridiculous idea. Chat was utterly dumbfounded. Papillion said that he would not feed Chat for three days, as punishment for such lies.

By the end of the second day, Chat was so hungry and so angry that he fell into the rage. He slammed his body against the large stone pillars, which held fast against the force. Two pillars still had cracks along their sides from the impact of his body against them. But the most damaging effect of this rage was one of the bells.

Chat had ran up to it and began to hit it furiously with his fists. The bell simply buckled under the pressure of his rage. What was left behind was a large, mangled piece of metal hanging from a rope.

Duusu had to hold him down as Chat began to cry bitterly, coming to his senses. The bells were like his family, each with a name. This bell was small, and very precious to Chat. He had named it Little Sister, and often talked to it as if it were his actual sister. When he realized what he had done during his rage, his heart broke.

From that time on, the only way to come out of his rage was by reminding him of Little Sister and her fate.

Duusu's memories were interrupted by Chat's voice.

"I'll be going to bed now," he said softly as he climbed into the bed.
"Good night."

Duusu looked over at Chat and then over to the curtains where Marinette was asleep, "Good night children. Sleep well."

Fingerprints of God

Marinette was sound asleep, her hair matted against the side of her head and Tikki snoring on her stomach when the sound of ringing bells made her sit up and scream in terror. She burst from the closed curtains with her hands on either side of her head and looked around her. There were at least six bells ringing at once around her. Their deep tones made the pit of her stomach lurch and twist. Tikki was barking madly beside her.

She ran to the edge of the large landing and looked over the edge where the ropes were moving. Below her, she saw Chat happily pulling the ropes. At last, he released the ropes and climbed to a nearby window. He was staring at something down below. Marinette walked to a window on the same side and peered down.

The bright light from the rising sun cast shadows on the streets as smoke from fires began to emerge from chimneys. Small specks of people began to move about as the day began. Soldiers circled the streets below, voices began to call out, and children began to run about. Marinette smiled as she rested her head on the sill, seeing the world from this place was truly an amazing sight.

"Mornings are always so much fun to watch," Chat's voice made her jump. "S-sorry!"

"You scared me," Marinette laughed, "but I can see what you mean. Seeing the town begin to stir as the new day begins, it is an amazing sight."

"The best part is seeing the bells in the morning light," Chat grinned as he turned to look at the shimmering bells overhead.

Marinette looked up as well, the bells shone like gold in the light. Her smile grew as she began to walk around the tower.

"Shall I introduce you?" Chat asked, as he followed her.

"I'd love to meet them," she answered, never taking her eyes off their glittering metal.

"This," Chat said as he climbed the pillars next to the bells, "is Matera, beside her is Patero. They are the largest bells of Notre Dame. A-and here are the triplets," Chat leapt from one pillar to another where three identical bells hung, "Hugo, Louis, and Emma. On the other side are their mischievous cousins," he swung around the pillar and placed a hand on the center bell, "Sah, Belxari, and Yval."

Marinette could not stop the huge grin on her face as she watched Chat introduce each bell to her.

"And here is the most beautiful bell in all of Paris," Chat said as he landed on a far platform, "We ring this bell on special occasions such as holidays and important festivals."

"What's her name?" Marinette asked as she walked up to the bell.

"Nathalie," Chat said with pride as he ran a gentle hand down the bell.

Marinette looked at the metal bell before her, "What makes her more beautiful than the others?"

Chat grinned cheekily, he had been waiting for her to ask, "Take a look inside."

Marinette crouched down and stepped inside. She felt her mouth drop as she was faced with gems larger than her head. She ducked out of the bell as fast as she could and stared at Chat, "That was..."

"Pretty cool, huh?" Chat said slyly, leaning on the side of the bell. There was something about the way she had looked at him as he

introduced the bells to her that made him so comfortable. He had never felt this comfortable with another... human.

"Who was that?" Marinette's eyes had drifted beyond him and into a far corner. Chat turned and felt his stomach knot.

In the farthest corner of the tower, taken down and hidden below a blanket years ago, gathering dust, was Little Sister. Chat had hidden her away from Archdeacon Fu, unwilling to give her up.

"That was... Little Sister," Chat practically whispered as Marinette walked toward it and began to pull the blanket away. "No!" Chat pulled the blanket back over the bell, "I don't want you to see what happened to her."

Marinette frowned, "Why not? What happened?"

Chat smoothed the fabric quietly. How could he tell her that he had gotten angry and done that? What would she think? His strength alone was frightening, he knew that. What on earth would she say if she saw that when he got angry he could destroy an entire bell?

"A terrible mistake," Chat said at last, "That's all I want to say about it."

Marinette raised her eyebrows sadly, "I'm sorry."

They stood in silence for a moment until the obvious sound of Marinette's stomach rumbled in the space between them. Marinette's face grew red as the two laughed at the sound.

"I don't suppose you'd know where to get some food, do you?" Marinette laughed as the two made their way back to the living space.

"I know that Fu provides meals for those who are hungry down in the church," Chat said as he pointed toward the stairs.

In a moment, Chat's face fell from happiness to nearly dread. Marinette spotted it at once.

"What is it?" she asked as she called Tikki to her side.

"Judge Papillion, my master," Chat answered vaguely.

Marinette's eyes widened as she glanced from Chat, to her little room, and back again.

"He comes to see me every day, if he finds you are here..." Chat's voice trailed as he and Marinette had the same plan. They began to pull the little space for her down and pile it discretely.

"We'll just hide this here, you can go down now so he does not find you on the stairs. Hurry!" Chat urged as finished hiding the addition.

Marinette nodded and rushed down the stairs as fast as she could, Tikki on her heels. She pushed open the door leading into the church and made her way into the sanctuary. She nearly tripped over Fu, who seemed to be waiting for her.

"I have a nice meal for you two right this way," Fu said as he ushered her toward another room in the large church.

The sound of the main doors opening dramatically pulled their attention. Judge Papillion and a small group of guards entered. Fu grumbled before advancing on him.

"No soldiers in pursuit of the girl are allowed inside this church!" he shouted angrily as Papillion glided toward the door Marinette just escaped from.

"They are my escort," Papillion defended mockingly as he opened the door, "the soldiers in search of the girl are at every single exit to this church. They will not enter, they will not drag her out," he added through gritted teeth. Marinette's frown turned into a scowl as he ascended the stairs in his haughty manner.

Fu eyed the guards warily before returning to Marinette, leading her to where he had placed her food, away from prying eyes.

Marinette sat down before the food and sighed, "How a man like him raised a person like Chat Noir is beyond me."

"I find myself asking the same questions whenever I am lucky enough to converse with the boy," Fu agreed as he presented Marinette with a serving of bread and soup.

"He tells me that you taught him a lot," Marinette mused as she accepted the food, "he is incredibly smart and intuitive. His work with wood shows how smart he really is."

"I have ever only taught him the very basics. I do not know where his knowledge comes from," Fu responded kindly before crossing himself. Marinette bowed her head as Fu blessed the food.

"Really," Marinette awed, "He must have had a nursemaid or someone like that to care for him."

"I cannot say," Fu mused as he glanced out the window to the streets beyond the wall, "Papillion was around as often as he could be with the boy, and I was around even less, it seemed. But the child was able to live, nonetheless."

"It can't have been his curse," Marinette thought out loud, "curses like that where the child is turned half animal does not give the human animal instincts. His ears and tail might move as a cat's, but he is completely human. There had to be *someone* who provided for him where Papillion did not."

"You know magic?" Fu asked, trying very hard to sound offended.

Marinette blushed hard as she took a long drink. She swallowed the liquid with difficulty before choking out an answer, "Technically, yes. But curses and hexes are not really in my code of ethics."

"Not really?" Fu repeated, a ghost of a laugh on his lips.

"Father, forgive me, for I have sinned," Marinette laughed back as she held her hands in a prayer-like position in front of her face. Fu only let out a hearty laugh.

"You don't disapprove of hexing some people?" Marinette asked, eyes wide and mouth agape.

"Of course I disapprove," Fu said, his mood changing suddenly, but his eyes sparkled once more with mirth, "But if there is anything I have learned from my studies of Who God is and who we are as man, is that we are all flawed. 'There is none righteous, no, not one,'" he quoted with a raised finger, to accent his point.

"Papillion would say otherwise," Marinette grinned down at her bowl.

"Judge Papillion is just as flawed as the rest of us. Being a man of power, he has lost sight of what is important. Someday he may come to see the light," Fu smiled as he accepted Marinette's bowl and cup, "but until then, we are all subject to his rule. Our Lord works in mysterious, and often times uncomfortable ways," he added as he heard Papillion leave the tower in his usual huff, "in time, it will all work out, 'for the good of those who love Him.'"

"And those who are called according to His purpose," Marinette finished as she followed him out of the room. "I just hope the people He calls are on their way. There are people out there who need help as soon as possible."

"Who knows," Fu grinned as he opened the door to the tower for the gypsy, "maybe the ones He is calling are in a world that is much too loud. He calls out to some in a very small, still voice."

Marinette returned Fu's smile before returning up the stairs to see Chat.

For a week this was the routine. They would wake up in the morning and Chat would ring the bells. He taught Marinette how to ring one of the bells, which was humorous to watch. She could not use her weight properly as a counter to the large bell for the longest time. Finally, she climbed up to a support beam and placed her feet upside down on it to form the leverage she needed to get the bell to chime. If only Judge Papillion, the righteous and upright judge of Paris, was being called to evening Mass by a girl with her skirt wrapped around her knees so she would not be exposed as she stood upside down and pulled the rope up above her head like a madwoman.

After the morning bells were rung, the two would walk around the tower together as they gazed at streets below. Their favorite game was spotting the most ridiculous incident of the morning. Chat knew which townsfolk would provide the best entertainment and he would always be the first to point them out. Marinette, who was just happy to see him smiling, did not mind constantly losing at the game.

After their morning stroll, they would hide Marinette's bed away and she would go down for her early lunch. While there, she would talk to Archdeacon Fu about who could have possibly nursed Chat. She once had a man who had come for prayer join her and added his own wild schemes of how it was done.

"Maybe a large bird would care for him at night, thinking it was one of her own chicks," he offered.

"He's allergic to feathers. He has a terrible time walking around any of the gargoyles who have nests on them," Marinette shot down.

"Maybe a cat got up there?"

"Possible, but I doubt an animal like that would try to care for a toddler," she reached out and pulled on the man's shirt as a toddler would a cat's tail.

"He has his own to pull," he added, smoothing the sleeve again.

"Which means he probably pulled it a lot and cried," Marinette said, as if this were the key to figuring it all out, "so some person had to be there to get him to stop crying."

This would go on until Papillion left. He would scan the foyer for Marinette before sneering and walking out.

Marinette would return and talk to Chat about what Papillion had to say. Chat was often times depressed after these times because Papillion would fill his head with talk about how Gypsies were evil and should never be trusted. These times were difficult because Marinette had to try to change twenty years of lies from a man that he trusted with his whole being into as much truth as she could give.

They would continue their talks, albeit with difficulty, as Chat rang the bells at different times of day. Their talks would turn more lighthearted and enjoyable as the two completed the various chores about the tower until the sun set.

Then, the two would climb atop Notre Dame and watch as the sun set. Then they would lay back and find the constellations above.

The week turned into a month faster than they expected.

What happened even faster was the rate by which the two grew closer. Their conversations after Papillion left turned from truth finding to enjoyment much faster than before. Their jokes were much more vague but also more deeply rooted into their personalities than before. Marinette's bed was situated much closer than it was before. Their conversations lasted much MUCH longer than before. Marinette and Chat also realized they were much happier than they ever were before.

Marinette could not say for sure when she fell in love with Chat Noir. Was it when he first showed her Nathalie and grinned the way he had? Was it when they read one another's palms? Was it the first time he fell twenty feet while polishing Hugo? Was it the first time

they saw Judge Papillion nearly get run over by his own carriage and they laughed so hard she snorted?

She did not know.

Chat knew the very instant he fell in love with Marinette. It was when he made Papillion mad at him for arguing about Marinette's sins compared to Papillion's. He had said that they were equal. Papillion had let him have it after that. He told him all about his evil mother and how she had cursed him to look like a cat demon and only wanted him dead. He told Chat all about how she was ready to drown him in a well when Papillion intervened. She had taken his sword and cut herself across her chest, declaring how much she hated Chat and wished one of them would just die, and if Chat would not be kind enough to do it for her, she would die herself.

Marinette had not gone down to eat that day and was sitting on one of the crossbeams, listening. Her gut had twisted itself terribly and her heart ached as she watched Papillion share this story with Chat. From his body language, he had told Chat this before. But that did not change the amount of hurt Chat felt as Papillion glided out of the tower.

Marinette wasted no time in running to him and wrapping her arms tightly around him. She said nothing, just let him cry. She kissed his head and ran a hand through his hair as he wailed about how unfair it all was. He cried until his tears ran dry. That was when she finally spoke.

"I wish your mother could see you now," she whispered as she held him in a tight hug, "I wish she could see that you are a strong, smart, lovely man. You have made a home for yourself here. You have used your talents to create a beautiful world from what you see below. You even have a friend who loves you with every ounce of her being. No curse, no hateful word, no ill will can ever take that from you, Chat. Please don't be sad about the past. I'm here, Tikki's here, we are here for you and we will never hurt you."

That was the moment Chat fell desperately in love with Marinette.

Marinette, however, had grown incredibly restless. Everything she had learned from her time in Notre Dame was leading her in every different direction possible.

She wanted to find out who cared enough for Chat Noir that they kept him alive without Papillion or Archdeacon Fu's knowledge. Someone like that *had* to still care for him now. If she could find this person, then he would have the parental figure he desperately needed. On top of all this, she was also in desperate want of seeing her own parents back in the Court of Miracles. It was common knowledge that Marinette, the famous gypsy dancer was trapped in Notre Dame under sanctuary, and Marinette was more than ready to leave and go home.

But now she had both a mission to complete, and a person she never wanted to leave.

I Pray for You

Marinette sat on the top of Notre Dame beside Chat, watching the sunset. He hummed a song as he whittled on a piece of wood. The curls of the wood shavings slid down the slanted roof into a pile below.

"I think we should run away from here," Marinette said suddenly. The sound of the wood hitting the roof and being fumbled with by Chat was her first response.

"L-leave? B-but you have sanctuary here! You're safe here!"

"But we're not free," she responded, adding him as emphasis.

"Mari," Chat looked at her, searching for answers in her eyes, "I thought you were happy here."

The lump in her throat only seemed to grow as she tried to sort her thoughts, "I am, Chat. But this isn't my home. I have my parents, my other friends, and I can't just stay here and forget about them," she held out her hand toward the town below, "I miss them."

Chat looked down at the pile of shavings below him. He was thinking very hard about what she offered. "I can't leave Notre Dame."

Marinette felt her heart being ripped in two. She really did not belong there, but at the same time, she did. She loved Chat more than anything in the world. But her family and friends had her love too.

"I'll help you get out of here," Chat said suddenly. He knew that Marinette was getting more and more lonely. Their conversations for the past week had been mainly about her family and friends. He wanted to keep her with him, keep her safe. But he also wanted her to be happy.

"Will you come with me?" Marinette asked, hopeful for his response.

"There have been guards on every door since you came here," Chat ignored her question. Marinette frowned, he always did this when he was going to give her an answer she did not like. "But we won't use the doors," Chat took Marinette by the hand and led her down to one of the walkways on the side of the church. He called Tikki and picked her up, "Carry Tikki, I'll carry you."

Marinette raised an eyebrow, "What are you planning?"

Chat pointed down to where no soldiers were posted, "We are going from here to there."

"That is a very long drop," Marinette commented as she wrapped Tikki's eyes with a scarf.

"Yeah, well, I've done worse?" Chat smiled sheepishly.

"Okay, first of all: not with me on your back. And second of all: that was a dirty lie," Marinette scolded as she climbed onto Chat's back and wrapped her free arm under his right arm on held onto his left shoulder.

"First time for everything," Chat laughed as he lowered himself over the edge of the tower. Slowly, the pair began their descent. Chat leapt from ledge to ledge with ease as the ground slowly came closer. Marinette had to bite the inside of her cheek at one point when he missed a foothold and they dropped further than planned. They landed safely, at last, and Tikki jumped greatfully from Marinette's arms.

"If we can help it, we are not doing that ever again," Marinette gasped as she felt the long-missed feel of grass on her feet.

"That could have been so much worse," Chat laughed as he watched Tikki lay on her side, overplaying her relief to be on the ground once more.

Marinette laughed at the spectacle before glancing down toward where a pair of guards were making their way to the side of the church. She looked back at Chat with a look of panic in her eyes.

"Come with me," she pleaded.

Chat felt his body burn when he heard the desperation in her voice. Her eyes reflected the full moon in the darkness of the night and it took every ounce of will power within him to decline. "I can't," he reasoned, "if Papillion finds out that you and I left on the same night, he will hunt you down by using me. It's hard to ignore a grown man with a tail wandering Paris. I'll stay here." The sound of the guard's voices grew louder and Chat felt his body and voice working without him, "Go!" He waved the two away from him and began to climb the side of the church.

Marinette inhaled sharply, blinking away her tears as she watched him go. She turned to run into a nearby alley but hesitated one moment longer.

"Chat!" she called, catching his attention once more. She threw a string of beads up to him, he caught them easily. "If you ever decide to come and find me, look for the Court of Miracles. If ever you are in a plight, look for the family in the night!" With her final words, Marinette ran with Tikki on her heels into the night.

Chat looked at the string of beads and back to Marinette's retreating figure. He had no idea what she was talking about. With his new treasure in hand, Chat climbed the rest of the way up the church.

When he reached the top he was immediately confronted by a man in shining armor. Chat knew instantly that this man was a soldier, in a place he did not belong.

"I am looking for the gypsy, Ladybug, also known as Marinette," he whispered.

Immediately Chat threw his gloves on the ground and began swiping at the man.

"No soldiers," Chat shouted as the soldier dodged his hands, "Sanctuary! You do not belong here!"

"Wait, Ah! Stop!" the man said as he began to descend the stairway into the tower, "I mean her no harm!"

"Out!" Chat shouted again as he managed to grab the man's cloak.

"Will you calm down?!" the man pleaded as he responded in kind with Chat's shirt.

There was a moment of awkward silence as the two glared angrily at one another.

"I just wanted to say I was sorry for... well first of all for taking so long to apologise... second of all, I want to say I'm sorry for getting her trapped here," the man defensively.

"What?" Chat breathed as he released the man from his grasp.

"I have been trying to find a way to properly apologise," he answered as he presented a small box, "But I didn't know how. And on top of that," he motioned to the walls around them, "I kinda can't come see her for obvious reasons."

Chat raised an eyebrow in response.

"Uh," the man rubbed the back of his neck, the lack of response was hard to deal with. "Look," he lowered his head and pointed a hand at Chat, "my name is Captain Nino. I..." he stopped and mumbled, "work for Judge Papillion."

Chat narrowed his gaze disapprovingly.

"BUT," Nino raised his hand to point up, "I hate the guy. I'd rather work for an angry bear. So if you would be so kind as to give this gift

to her from... well... it's not really from me personally," he rambled, "I actually received this from a friend of hers. She and I... well..." he held up his hands and waved them around, "nevermind, it's complicated. The point it is," he looked up at Chat again, "I hate my job, your friend is awesome, her friend is gorgeous, my horse is parked in a no parking zone, please give her this thing," he took Chat's hand and pushed the box inside it, "I'll see you around."

Chat furrowed his eyebrows as he looked down at the box as Nino walked back down the stairs.

"Oh, and one more thing," Nino added, turning to face Chat again, "Tell Marinette she is really lucky."

"Why's that?" Chat finally said, looking at the man questioningly.

"She has an amazing friend like you to look out for her all this time," Nino smiled before disappearing from sight.

Chat huffed a little before looking back at the box. He opened it carefully and looked inside. There were two brilliant red earrings inside. The red color reminded him of a ladybug, which made him smile at the memory of the day they met.

With a heavy sigh, Chat returned to his little home, the echo of the laughter, the secrets, and the love from the former tenant there made his heart ache. With another sigh, he put away the blankets and extra things he had put together for Marinette, certain she would never come back.

Once he finished cleaning the space he rang the evening bells for mass, alone for the first time.

Judge Papillion sat in his large chamber, a roaring fire before him. He watched as the flames danced on the wood. The red flames reminded him of how her dress had flowed as she danced that day. The shadows on the walls reminded him of her dark hair. It seemed

that no matter what he did, he always saw her somewhere. His fingers twitched as he gripped the wood of the armrest of his chair.

He had only ever felt this desire with one other person. It made him sick to think of it. Her shining green eyes still made him feel... utter loathing. He hated her and he hated the wretched Ladybug for bringing the memory of her back with such power.

But what could he possibly do?

Papillion stood and began to pace. He began to pace and pray.

"Maria," he mumbled as the sound of his footsteps echoed about him, "I am a man of righteous calibur. I am within my rights to feel great pride for my righteousness. So now I must ask you, why have you sent this woman, this Ladybug into my life? Is this a reminder to me of her?" He turned toward the window facing Notre Dame as the sound of the bells reached his ears, "Is this a second chance?"

Immediately he summoned one of his soldiers, commanding him to search the cathedral for the girl. She had had long enough in her sanctuary. He would bring her to him and offer her a very nice deal. This was the second chance he needed. She would be his second chance.

He continued to pray for the next hour. His somewhat pleasant demeanor from realizing that he could get what he wanted changed, however, when the soldier returned with bad news.

Ladybug had escaped from the cathedral. It had to have happened that night. Papillion himself had seen her in the foyer when he had visited Chat Noir.

As a man of God, he could not let her get away. The need to have *her* in order to fulfill his second chance was much more important. He would find her even if it meant burning down all of Paris to find her.

She would either be his, or burn in the flames of the one who had sent her, the Devil himself.

That next morning, he called the guards to gather before the Palace of Justice. Nino brought the soldiers to attention as he emerged from the large doors.

Captain Nino saluted the judge as he descended the stairs, "The troops await your orders, sir."

Papillion mounted his black horse in a single movement, "Find the escaped Gypsy girl, Ladybug."

"You mean Marinette?" Nino clarified.

Papillion sneered, "I don't care *what* she is called, just find her and arrest her. Do whatever it takes."

With that, the soldiers under the judge's command began to raid any house that could possibly house any gypsies. Papillion hoped to find someone who knew where Marinette was.

Wonderful, Merciful Savior

Nino was growing more and more angry with the position he was in. He watched as dozens of men, women, and children were subjected to being thrown into rivers, chased from their places of business, and arrested simply because they were gypsies.

Each place they investigated made Nino fear the worst for the woman he had received the little gift from only a few days before. It was only a matter of time before she was found.

Each time a line of new prisoners were presented to Papillion, he scanned every face to make sure she was not there.

But the final straw came when they investigated the Miller's home. Papillion had taken a talisman from one of the prisoners they had found earlier that day and showed it to the husband.

"We found this Gypsy talisman on your property," he accused, "Are you harboring gypsies here?"

The miller knelt before the honorable judge and lifted his purple robes in reverence, "Our home is always open to weary travellers. But we know nothing of Gypsies."

"Very well," he responded as he put the talisman away and began to exit the building, "but we will hold you in house arrest until the matter is resolved. If you are indeed innocent, you have nothing to worry about."

Nino remained in the home a moment longer than Papillion, looking from the frightened faces of the wife and child, an infant wailed in the mother's arms. He sighed before following Papillion out.

Papillion took the spear of one of the men and placed it in front of the door so no one could get out. Then, he looked directly at Nino and whispered, "Burn it."

Nino's face paled, "You want me to murder the innocent?"

"No," Papillion said innocently, "I want you to make an example of this family." He motioned to the large crowd of people gathered on the street, just beyond the bridge.

Nino grit his teeth, "I was not trained to kill the innocent."

"No," Papillion agreed as he took a torch and handed it to him, "you were trained to follow orders. Burn it."

Nino took the torch and walked up to the house. There had been no rain or snow for almost a month and a half. If he were to even bring the flames close to the thatch roof, the entire home would become nothing but ash within the hour. He made up his mind right there. With a single motion, he drenched the flame in a bucket of water, making eye-contact with Papillion the entire time.

"Insolent coward," Papillion hissed as he took a second torch from another soldier and threw it onto the roof. The entire home went up in flames.

Nino gasped as he heard the sound of the family inside screaming. Letting his instincts kick in, he leapt through the window and pulled the entire family from the burning home. The family escaped into the crowd before they could be grabbed by the soldiers. Nino was not so lucky. He was grabbed immediately and forced to kneel before Papillion.

"It was such a pity," Papillion drolled, "you had such a hopeful career. Insubordination is punishable by death."

With a big grin on his face, Nino responded, "I consider it my highest honor."

What no one knew at the home was that Marinette had been researching in the small village nearby with Alya. They were both in the crowd when the home went up in flames. Marinette, knowing

Papillion was searching for her, took the chance to lead the family back into the village where they would be safe.

Alya remained. She had met Nino a few times as she came to check on Marinette during her stay at Notre Dame. She was never able to actually get inside the church, but spoke often to Nino, who was the only guard who would not try to arrest her. They would both talk to Archdeacon Fu as well to get an update on how she was doing. It was during this time that Alya heard of Chat's story and how much Marinette wanted to know the truth. Alya had been researching and hunting among various gypsies who dabbled in transformation magic for a while. Her research had led her to this village, where an old woman lived. She and Marinette had just finished talking to her when the commotion of the Miller and his family drew the crowds across the bridge. She did not want to see her new friend die.

She elbowed her way to the front of the crowd with a rock wrapped in a cloth in her hand. She took aim and flung the rock at the hind quarters of the horse Papillion sat upon. The horse reared up and knocked Papillion off. In the commotion, Nino managed to break free from the men's hold and take the horse back toward the village. Alya broke from the crowd as they began to scatter. The soldiers were shooting him with dozens of arrows.

Alya faltered when she saw an arrow strike Nino in the shoulder, sending him off the horse and over the edge of the bridge. She ran to the bank of the river as more and more arrows flew into the place where Nino had fallen into the water.

"Don't waste your arrows," Papillion shouted as the soldiers stopped firing. "Let the traitor drown in his watery grave."

Once the coast was clear, Alya dove into the water in search of the man. The water was murky, but she spotted the glint of Nino's heavy armor nearby. It took all of her strength to get him up and out of the water. His heavy armor had to be left behind on the river bed. Alya dragged Nino to the shore to find Marinette running down to meet them.

"I came as soon as I heard," she gasped as the two women knelt beside Nino's body. He was gasping for breath and bleeding heavily from his left shoulder.

"We need to get him to safety," Alya gasped as she pulled some wet hair off of her face.

"I know just the place," Marinette said as she moved to lift the man's body on her shoulders.

The two began to climb up the bank with the dead weight between them.

"Isn't this the guy who got you stuck in Notre Dame?" Alya asked through grunts.

"Yeah, he's a jerk like that," Marinette laughed back.

"Where are we taking him?" Alya questioned when they found a wagon headed to Paris.

Marinette only grinned back as she paid the man for his trouble, "Notre Dame."

Alya snorted as she made room for her friend, "Nice."

You Make Me Want to be Brave

Papillion was getting more and more frustrated. The skyline of Paris was polluted with the dark smoke of fire. Still, he found no trace of Marinette. He stood in his grand palace, looking over his work, unsatisfied.

"How could she have escaped," he questioned as he ran his hand over his head, "I had guards at every single door. Soldiers were constantly patrolling the perimeter. There is no way she could have..." his thoughts were interrupted by the distant sound of the bells of Notre Dame. Chat Noir had become very defensive of that gypsy girl. She must have been talking to her. "He wouldn't have," he whispered to himself.

Duusu, Trixx, and Plagg leaned over the balcony, looking at the remains of Paris below.

"This is not good," Plagg moaned as he looked to his two friends.

"What are we going to do?" Trixx asked Duusu.

Duusu balled her hands into fists as they leaned on the ledge of the balcony. Her mind was reeling with thoughts. "We stay here with Chat."

"Duusu," Plagg placed a paw on her back, "I get where you are coming from. I want to stay here too," he extended his paw over the skyline, "But there are people in trouble out there. People who are dying at the hands of Judge Papillion."

Duusu let out an exasperated sigh as she dropped her head into her hand, "I just can't leave him here. He's still so young, so naive to this world. He depends on us."

"But we are protectors of this city," Trixx reasoned, "to ignore that for the sake of only one person is... is..."

"Negligent," Plagg finished.

Duusu raised her head and looked to her friends. They smiled weakly at her, "You're right."

"Have they found Mari yet?" Chat's voice interrupted as he leaned over the balcony beside them.

"I don't think so," Plagg sighed as another pillar of smoke began to rise from the horizon.

"That's good," Chat's shoulders slumped, "I'm afraid of what might happen to her if she is ever found."

Duusu took a deep breath, "Well," she let out a laugh, "if we have learned anything about that girl, it's that she's resourceful. She won't let that man get anywhere near her if she doesn't want him there."

"Yeah," Chat laughed in agreement, "there really is no one like her," he smiled dreamily into the distance, thinking about Marinette and the way she could do just about anything with the right materials. She had managed to tie a rope from one end of the tower to the other and taught Chat how to slide down it as a game. She was so amazing.

"And she thinks the world of you, Chat," Trixx cheered as she wrapped her arms around him.

"What?" Chat choked.

"Oh if you could see the way she looks at you!" she continued, "believe me, I've seen love before. What she has for you goes so far beyond that!" she took Chat by the hand and dragged him next to his model of the city and sat him down. She sat across from him and took his hand and pointed at the lines there, "she saw you as a human, a total and complete human, from the very first time she met you. Not even Judge Papillion will look at you like that," she dragged him over to where Nathalie sat in her corner, "She enjoyed being

with you every single day. You would talk for hours on end about some of the most mundane things. You argued over things that were important. You argued over even the most trivial of things! But you two always grew ever closer!" she brought him back to the main landing where their two beds would lay side by side, "You two were practically a married couple by the time the month was over. And she wanted you to come with her so badly!"

"Wh-what are you saying, Trixx?" Chat laughed as his face grew a deep red.

"She's saying you have got a major shot with this gal," Plagg chuckled as he lounged nearby.

"Once this is all over, you two are ready to start your life all over and have a happily ever after!" Trixx laughed as she danced around Chat.

Chat laughed as he watched Trixx dance about, his blush not going away anytime soon. "Okay, okay!"

Duusu watched the small group in silence, a small smile on her face.

"Chat Noir?" the voice made Trixx and Plagg jump before they ran to hide.

"Mari," Chat whispered before running down toward a side door where the voice came from, "Marinette!"

Marinette ran forward and wrapped her arms around his neck, resting her head on his shoulder. Chat placed one arm gently around her waist and the other he placed lovingly on the back of her head. "Oh, how I've missed you," she whispered in his ear.

"And I, you, M'lady," he whispered back before releasing her from his hug.

Marinette stepped out of his reach and back toward the door, revealing a man and woman. The man was unconscious, leaning fully on the woman for support.

"This is Nino," Marinette introduced, taking his arm and lifting it over her head to support him, "he is wounded and a fugitive like me. He needs help and a safe place to stay. Can you help us?"

Chat stepped between Alya and the man, taking the full weight upon himself as he ascended the stairs, "Follow me."

The two women followed closely as he led them to his bed. He placed Nino carefully on the bed and stepped back as Alya tended to him.

She pulled out some wine to help clean the wound.

"I could definitely use a drink right now," Nino laughed as he grunted in pain. He hissed when the liquid was poured over his shoulder, "Ah, yes. Feels great."

Alya smirked as she threaded a needle and began to sew his skin back together, "You know, you are one lucky soldier."

"Ex-soldier," Nino corrected, wincing in pain as the needle thread through his skin again, "I was shot and drowned, remember?"

Alya frowned, "You know you could have died?"

Nino turned to look away, "That family is alive. I think it was worth it."

"Crazy fool, that's what you are," Alya whispered as she tied off the stitch and cut the thread, "What on earth would possess you to be such a fool."

Nino looked back at her, taking her hand and placing it on his chest, "Men who are in love really do tend to act the fool, especially when they know the one they love is in danger."

"Who is she? I would like to meet her someday," Alya said, choking back a few tears, thinking she was not the one he spoke of.

"Oh," Nino hummed as he looked above him, "She's a beautiful woman with dark skin, bright brown hair, and dark brown eyes. She really likes my lame jokes and tends to make a fuss when I get shot."

"Oh," was all she could say in response. She leaned down and pressed her lips to his in answer.

Marinette and Chat had slipped away to give the pair some privacy.

"I actually met Nino before," Chat said with a nervous laugh, "He gave me this box." Chat pulled the box from beside him and presented it to Marinette.

"What is it?" she asked as she eyed the box carefully.

"It's a gift from... um... I'm guessing the woman over there?"

Marinette's face split into a wide smile as she opened the box. She pulled out two bright red earrings and put them into her ears excitedly.

"You have no idea how happy I am to have these back!" she laughed.

"What's so special about them?" Chat asked as he admired the shine of red.

"They help me talk to Tikki," she smiled, looking down at where Tikki curled up next to her. She laughed at Chat's face of confusion, "Magic, Chat. It's magic."

"Oh," Chat nodded, glancing over at where Plagg, Trixx, and Duusu were frozen as statues, "That makes perfect sense, actually."

A calm silence fell between them. Marinette felt her heart beating fast as she revelled in being beside Chat again.

"Papillion will stop at nothing," she sighed as she sat on the ledge of the balcony.

Chat sat beside her, looking toward the city as it continued to burn, "I don't know how this is all going to end."

Marinette sighed again, desperately wanting to change the subject. "So I have been on the hunt for some information," she began.

"Really?" Chat asked, leaning forward in interest, "about what?"

"About what happened twenty years ago on the steps of Notre Dame," she glanced down to the streets below.

Chat paused, she couldn't possibly be trying to find out what happened to him, could she?

"I have gathered information from Archdeacon Fu, some various people from the Court of Miracles, and a knowledgeable witch in the village where Nino was shot. I think I'm getting close to the truth," Marinette grinned at Chat.

"The truth about what?" Chat asked.

"Who your mother was and what really happened to her," Marinette answered. "I asked around the Court of Miracles about a woman who had a cursed baby and who I could talk to about that type of magic. Turns out, there was a woman who was raped by a man of power, though no one knows who it was. It was really *him* who had the baby cursed to look like a cat. The witch I talked to was not the one who cast the spell, but she is fairly certain that she knew who did. I was actually on my way to go find that woman when we ran into Nino."

"Wait," Chat said as he waved his hands in front of him, "are you telling me that Judge Papillion lied about my mother?"

Marinette looked at him with a raised eyebrow, "Are you seriously asking that?"

Chat blushed at her, "So she actually did not curse me herself?"

Marinette hesitated, she wanted to tell him about how his mother was killed by Papillion, but she did not know how to say it.

Their silence was interrupted by the sound of a carriage below.

"Oh no," Chat moaned, "he's here. You have to get out of here!"

The pair rushed over to Alya and Nino, "He can't come with us, can you keep him safe here?" Alya begged as she and Marinette were ushered to a side door.

"Of course," Chat promised, "Take the South stairs, they're the safest."

The sound of the door leading to the tower echoed as Marinette turned to Chat one more time, "Be careful," she pleaded before wrapping her arms around his torso and placing a kiss on his cheek. Chat could only nod stupidly as the pair fled to safety.

Chat snapped out of his daze and rushed back to the main landing, Plagg, Trixx, and Duusu all had grabbed Nino and hid with him in a dark corner of the tower, out of sight.

In the Eye of the Storm

"M-Master," Chat laughed nervously as he reached Papillion, "I was not expecting you today."

"I will always take time to eat a nice meal with you, boy," Papillion said calmly, placing a basket on the table.

Chat took his cue to get the plates and goblets, breaking a few things as he did so. Papillion smirked as Chat fumbled. He had all the information he needed right there. He had seen the little figure of Marinette in the model town before, but now the little figure only made him angry.

"I've been searching tirelessly for that girl, you know," he smiled as he placed grapes on each plate.

"Yes, Master," Chat answered breathily, "Have you had any luck finding her?"

Papillion frowned, "You know, none of this would even be a problem if someone had not helped her escape."

Chat sat still, staring up at Papillion.

"I know it was you who helped her escape, Chat Noir," he accused.

"Master?" Chat whispered.

"You!" Papillion threw the plates of food from the table, causing Chat to fall backward in retaliation and fear, "are the reason the city now burns! You are the reason people have DIED!"

"But she is not evil," Chat responded quietly.

"She is a Gypsy, you fool!" Papillion threw the delicate buildings onto the floor, "Any act of kindness she showed you was in attempt to

trick you into doing what she wanted! She used you!"

"B-but, Master," Chat hiccuped as tears filled his eyes.

"Think of your MOTHER," Papillion grabbed Chat by the shoulders, "All Gypsies are alike! They do not really care about others! They only want to survive! People are nothing more than their own little toys to play with!"

Chat buckled under the weight of both his body and his words. His knees hit the floor. Papillion released him and straightened himself.

"But don't worry, boy," he said as he swept his cloak as he turned, "I have searched this city from top to bottom and have found their little hideaway at last. I will attack at dawn with a thousand men. Then, the gypsy Marinette will be burned at the stake for witchcraft and will be out of your life forever."

Chat's eyes shined with tears as his master descended the stairs. His head swam with what he could possibly do to help.

"We have to get there first, warn the people," a voice said from a far corner of the room.

"Nino?" Chat asked as the man came into view.

"This is the part where I say something clever and witty, but," he adjusted his pants and began to go toward the South stairs, "I just don't have that kind of time."

Chat smirked before following him. "So what's the plan?"

"Are you really willing to leave the safety of the tower?" Nino asked abruptly.

Chat inhaled sharply, balling his hands into two fists, "If it means protecting Marinette, it will be worth anything this world can throw at me."

Nino chuckled as the two emerged on the street below, "Now... where are we going?"

Chat ran a hand over his head and looked up at the skies. He furrowed his eyebrows as he glanced from the stars to his wrist, where the bright beads of Marinette's bracelet was tied tightly to him.

He held up his wrist and examined the beads carefully. Each bead had a different constellation engraved on it, but beneath each one was an arrow pointing in a different direction. He looked up at the skies again, trying to find the constellations above him.

"Uh, Chat Noir?" Nino asked as he watched him stare at his wrist and then up at the stars, "What are you doing?"

"She gave me a map to get to her," Chat grinned as he located another constellation.

"That is a string of beads," Nino pointed out.

"They are a map," Chat corrected, holding the beads up so he can see, "each picture on the beads is a different constellation found in the night sky. Beneath each of them is an arrow pointing in a specific direction. If you were to find each constellation and follow where the arrow leads," Chat began to run down the streets of Paris excitedly, Nino trailing behind, "They all point to the same place!"

"Great," Nino called out, "So where are we going?"

"The Court of Miracles," Chat said flatly, "Duh."

"Silly me," Nino responded just as flatly, "How could I *not* know that was what you were planning."

After a few silent minutes of travel Nino's curiosity as to where they were headed returned, "Care to explain in more detail as to where we are going?"

"I had talked to Marinette before about how to find the Court of Miracles," Chat explained as he walked, "she told me that the best place to start was town square, where Notre Dame is, and it's a straight line there," Chat pointed ahead of them, "This road leads straight to the Court of Miracles."

The two stopped when they reached a daunting archway, "No," Nino said pointing to the large sign overhead, "this leads us to the graveyard."

Chat raised an eyebrow, "You're not scared, are you, Captain?"

Nino frowned, "What is there to be afraid of? We're just walking into a graveyard at night. Looking for a secret organization that has remained hidden for many many years. People have probably died looking for this place. The place is to be attacked in a matter of hours. Nothing to be afraid of at all."

The pair wandered toward the center of the graveyard where a large tomb stood out from the rest. Chat looked from the symbol on the tomb to a symbol on the largest bead on the string.

"Is this it?" Nino asked as he stepped closer to read the inscription on the tomb.

"Looks like it," Chat said looking around the tomb.

"Well, it will take me a few minutes to decode these words, and then we will be on our way," Nino said as he ran his finger over the words.

Chat grabbed the large stone on the top of the tomb and slid it aside, revealing a large stairway leading below the ground.

"Yes," Nino agreed as he looked down, "or we can just follow the stairs."

"I figured you already got that part translated," Chat grinned as the two climbed down.

"Oh course I did," Nino lied.

At the bottom of the stairs, the pair found the old catacombs. The walls were lined with cobwebs, skeletons, and the occasional rat.

Nino smirked when he saw Chat's ears turn toward the sound of the rats running around. "So can you hear really well with those things?"

"I didn't used to think so," Chat said honestly, "One time, Marinette said I started laughing really hard when someone down on the street told a good joke," Chat laughed to himself just thinking about it, "she said she couldn't make out a single word of the conversation."

"Hm," Nino hummed as they walked on.

"The really cool thing I can do," Chat said tapping his temple, "is see in the dark."

"Really," Nino said in honest amazement, "You should join the army. We could use a man like you in our ranks."

Chat stopped dead in his tracks, "Someone's here with us," he whispered.

"I figured as much," Nino deadpanned, "we've been due for some sort of trap."

Something blunt hit Nino's hand, causing him to drop his torch into the water at their feet, engulfing them in darkness. Chat blinked as his eyes adjusted to the darkness. Nino had crouched down and was waving his hands to find the legs of someone attacking him, finding no one.

"They're surrounding us on all sides," Chat warned as figures of a dozen people suddenly emerged from the walls. Each masked face grinned as they produced various ropes, chains, and other restraints.

In a flash of light, a few torches were lit in their faces, blinding both men. Chat grunted in pain as the white light overrode his senses. He

lifted his hands to cover his eyes only to have them grabbed and tied up.

Nino was not much better off. He had been jumped on by what seemed to be a child. She hit him repeatedly on the back, making him shout in pain from his wound. A large man with a golden mask covering his whole head tied his hands tightly behind him and pushed him forward down the tunnel.

The crowd began shouting in victory as they paraded them into the light of what could only be the Court of Miracles.

"Look what we found!"

"They're spies for Papillion!"

"Hang them both!"

"Someone go get Nathaniel!"

"I'm already here, love! Let's have a little fun with them!"

Nathaniel, the man who led the Festival of Fools, stood tall on a stockade near the entrance of the Court. He smiled wide as the two were dragged, gagged and struggling, to his side.

A large crowd of colorfully dressed gypsies all cheered as he began to talk.

"I have good noose tonight, everyone!" he said as he motioned to the hangman's noose behind him, "We have a couple of spies from Judge Papillion himself! The Captain of the Guard, Nino Lahiffe, and his henchman the mysterious black cat, the bell ringer of Notre Dame!"

The two men were pulled over to the hangman's tree and put through the noose.

"Now," Nathaniel explained to the men, "normally, we would put you through a fair trial, but since you and your precious Master are no longer giving us that luxury..." he trailed as his hand grabbed the lever, "Fair is fair, you know."

Just as his hands gripped the lever tightly, a voice called out from the crowd, "STOP!"

Nathaniel looked out to see Marinette and Alya running toward the platform.

"Stop it!" Alya shouted as she climbed up and began to untie Nino.

"These men aren't our enemies," Marinette explained to the crowd, "They are our friends!"

"Why didn't they just say so in the first place, then?" Nathaniel argued as both men pulled their gags out.

"We tried," Chat gasped.

"Nino saved the miller's family," Alya shouted as Nino wrapped a protective arm around her.

"And Chat Noir helped me escape Notre Dame," Marinette added, standing beside him.

"There's no time to waste," Nino shouted to everyone, "Papillon knows where the Court of Miracles is. He plans to attack at dawn with a thousand men!"

"Everyone needs to escape as soon as possible!" Chat added, addressing the crowd, "Take only what is necessary and find a place to hide!"

"Quickly, everyone!" Marinette shouted as the people began to rush to their carts and gather their belongings.

People ran about shouting and helping one another with various boxes, bags, and children. Chat stared in awe at the way the people all worked together to protect one another.

"You took such a huge risk to get here," Marinette said quietly to the men, "We all are really grateful."

Alya swung a bag over her head and handed another to Marinette, "Your parents are worried, Mari."

"Your parents, the bakers?" Chat clarified as he looked out, trying to see them.

"Yes," Marinette laughed, "I'll be travelling out with them." She hugged Chat tightly, "Thank you so much, Chat."

"It was all thanks to you, Mari," Chat smiled as they parted slightly, "if it weren't for your beads, I would never have figured it out."

"Nor would I," the deep voice of Papillion rang out over the shouts of the crowd. Hundreds and hundreds of soldiers emerged from the entrance to the Court. In a matter of minutes, the entire population of the Court was arrested, chained, and ready to be taken away to the Palace of Justice. Chat, Nino, Marinette, and Alya were cornered. Chat was the only one who was not arrested.

"Master, please!" Chat tried to reason.

"Well done, Chat Noir," Papillion applauded, "After twenty years of searching, I have finally found the breeding grounds for all Gypsy vermin in all of Paris." He raised his arms as he addressed the entire crowd, "I am hosting a little bonfire in town square tomorrow, and you are all invited to attend."

Chat dropped to his knees as his friends were taken away.

"Take him back to the bell tower," Papillion ordered, "And be sure he does not leave."

Here am I, Lord, Send Me

Chat felt his body being lifted and returned to the tower. He felt his body being chained to the large pillars of the bell tower. He heard the voices of Duusu, Trixx, and Plagg as they questioned him over what had happened. He heard the distant cries of every gypsy being brought to the town square to be burned to death for their crimes against Papillion. But his whole body was numb and limp.

"Chat," Duusu begged as she knelt before him, "Please you HAVE to break out of these chains."

Chat pulled helplessly at the metal, nothing.

"Come on, kid," Plagg grunted as he pulled at the chains with him, "You have to try harder than that!"

"Marinette's being brought to the podium," Trixx said sadly as she looked over the balcony.

In the square below, Papillion addressed the crowd of gypsies about him, "The gypsy Marinette has been found guilty of the crime of Witchcraft. Her sentence: Death."

Marinette looked out toward her people as their cries of desperation carried in the air. Her attention was pulled to the man before her.

"It's not too late," Papillion said with a wicked smile, "I can save you from the flames of both this world and the next."

Marinette's eyes grew wide as his words sunk in.

"Chose me," he held up the torch in his hand, "or the fire."

The choice was very clear at this point. She made her opinion clear when she spat into his face. "I chose the freedom of death over a life

with you. If my death pays for the freedom of Chat Noir and every gypsy here, it will be worth it."

Papillion scowled at her, "The Witch has refused to recant! This evil witch has put the soul of every citizen of Paris in jeopardy. She has been the cause of countless deaths," the voices of the outraged shouted their denial of the lie, "and now she will face the punishment for her crime."

Chat refused to look up as Plagg and Trixx relayed the events to him.

"Chat, you have to do something!" Duusu continued to beg, "You love her with all your heart and Judge Papillion is going to take her from you!"

"I can't do anything!" Chat shouted back, "Every time I try to help it only ends in disaster!"

Plagg had enough. "Are you really going to stand aside and let the love of your life be killed by the hands of the same man who took your own mother?!"

Chat looked up in shock.

"Plagg," Duusu whispered.

"No!" Plagg argued, "That man took away the first person in this entire world who loved him like he should have been loved! He took away the one person in anyone's life who can help a child survive! He took away God's greatest gift to a child! He took away not only his mother, but he took away his father as well!"

"My father?" Chat questioned.

"And now," Plagg continued, "He is taking away the greatest thing to happen to him since that night! He is taking away his true love! He is

taking away the only happiness you have ever felt in these twenty long years and I am sick of it!"

Chat felt his heart beating faster as the words of the angry cat sank in. Papillion murdered his mother who truly loved him. Now he was going to murder the one woman in the world who still loved him.

Papillion lowered the torch onto the straw at Marinette's feet. They caught fire quickly. The smoke began to rise and swirl around her frame, causing her to cough. The smoke filled her lungs and began to slowly suffocate her to death.

All Chat saw was red. He pulled at the chains that bound him with all his might, the bells began to hum in anger with him. Soon, the pillars buckled under the stress and collapsed. The deafening sound of the crash caught the entire crowd's attention.

Chat grabbed the chain and wrapped it around one of the gargoyle's heads and swung down into the crowd below. He landed on the platform between Papillion and Marinette.

"Chat?! What are you?" Papillion stuttered as Chat stared at him, white hot fury in his eyes.

Chat turned and leapt into the flames, pulling Marinette free from the pire. He grabbed the chain and hoisted himself up and back onto the center balcony of Notre Dame. He lifted her unconscious body over his head, the dark smoke of the fires below darkening the skies above and shouted, "SANCTUARY!" Below, the crowd cheered, "SANCTUARY!" they cheered again, "SANCTUARY!"

Papillion turned to his new Captain of the guard, "Captain! Seize the Cathedral!"

Chat ran to a nearby room and placed Marinette's body on the little bed there. "Don't worry, Mari. I'll keep you safe here."

Duusu folded her arms and looked to her friends, "The time has come."

Plagg grinned as a flash of green encased his body, revealing a human with bright green eyes much like Chat Noir's. His body had similar traits as Chat's, working tail, ears, claws, and eyes. He leapt onto the ledge of the balcony, scanning the world below. Soldiers were bringing siege engines to the church, perfect.

Trixx stood tall as a flash of orange revealed her to be a human as well. Her brown hair looked like a fox tail trailing down her back. Her bright blue eyes flicked from side to side as she scurried over to a nearby window and leapt down. Flute in hand, she began to put soldiers into a trance-like state, leading them away from the church.

Duusu took a deep breath and allowed her body to change back as well. Her bright blonde hair flowed freely down her back. Her body was encased in brilliantly colored feathers, in her hand was a large fan. She stood on the platform, scanning the ground. She spotted the very person she needed, held the large fan over her back, and glided down.

Duusu landed gracefully beside Nino's cage. She looked up and smiled at him before taking her fan and slicing the lock open.

"I take it you're on our side?" Nino asked as he opened the door to his cage.

"I am on the side of Paris," she said sweetly before moving on to the next cage.

Nino grinned and climbed up to address the large crowd emerging from their cages, "Citizens of Paris: Judge Papillon has attacked our people, pillaged our homes, and murdered our loved ones. Now he has declared war on Notre Dame herself. Will we allow it?"

"NO!" Shouted the people as they took up their arms and began to charge the soldiers.

Plagg had just finished taking out his third war machine when he bumped into the little red dog that followed Marinette around.

"I don't suppose you're ready to help us out, M'lady?" he grinned.

With a flash of red, a short woman stood before him with her arms crossed, "Are you saying you can't handle this on your own, Kitten?"

Plagg only grinned as he extended a hand to her. The two ran into the battle hand-in-hand.

You Don't Own Me

Chat emerged from the room and looked out, the soldiers were trying to knock the doors of the church in. There was a large cauldron Chat used to make new bells or strengthen old bells with melted metal inside it. Chat rushed to the room and knocked the cauldron over, sending the dangerous metal down onto the streets below.

The crowd fled the dangerous metal, soldiers and citizens alike. It seemed as though in that instant, the battle was won.

Chat smiled as he ran back to where Marinette was, "We did it! We beat them back! It's all over! Come and see!" Chat cheered as he looked at Marinette and back out to the defeated army outside.

Papillion was not done. He was on the other side of the fires, nearly inside. He pulled out his sword and cut the rest of his way through the door, determined to finish what he started.

"Papillion!" Fu shouted as the judge rushed toward the door leading to the bell tower, "Have you lost your mind?! I will not allow you to attack the house of God!" Fu grabbed at the Judge's cloak and tried to hold him back, but Papillion swung his sword and tore the cloak from the man's hands.

"I have come in the name of God!" he shouted back, "and I will complete the job he gave me to do! And this time you will not interfere!"

He pushed Fu aside and rushed through the door, locking it behind him. The sound of Fu banging on the door shouting for him to return fell on deaf ears.

Chat stared at Marinette as she refused to move from where he laid her, "Marinette? Mari? Wake up, we've won. You're safe now." He knelt beside her, turning his face toward her, "Mari? Please..."

He found a bucket of water nearby and spooned the water into her mouth, it only dripped to the side.

She died. She had died and he never got to tell her how he felt. He lost her to Papillion just like he lost his mother.

He let out a desperate wail, cradling her lifeless body in his arms. This couldn't be happening, not again.

The sound of footsteps nearby caught his attention.

"Oh, poor Chat Noir," Papillion said softly, "To lose someone you love so dearly must be truly devastating."

"You killed her," Chat whispered as he laid her back down.

"As the judge of this city, it was my duty. I do not take pride in it," he lied as he pulled a dagger from a scabbard.

"She was my friend," Chat cried bitterly.

"There, there," Papillion cooed dryly, "Don't worry," he lifted the dagger high, "you will soon be out of your misery."

Chat looked up and saw the shadowy figure poised to kill. He turned just in time to see him bring the knife down toward him. "NO!" he shouted as he grabbed the man's wrist. He stood against the man and began to push back. Judge Papillion lost his footing and fell back. His grip on the dagger loosened and he fell to the ground, looking up at Chat Noir.

"Now, now, now, Chat Noir," Papillion tried to calm him down, "listen to me-"

"No, you listen!" Chat shouted back, "All my life you have told me how cruel and dangerous the world is! And I have seen both the cruelties and the kindness this world has to offer. I have seen the cruelty of the world in *your* men! I have seen their misdeeds and their disregard for the lives of others! I have seen the brash actions

of those who *you* persecuted! I have seen their immediate reaction to their persecution in an attempt to protect themselves from further harm! But I have also seen the kindness of some soldiers, *your* men, who look at people like me or Mari and see humans, total and complete humans, just like them! I have also seen people who you have persecuted sympathize with me and care about me! I have been subject to both cruelty and kindness," he dropped the dagger from his hand, "But all the cruelty in this world seemed to stem from one single root: YOUR HATRED FOR THOSE WHO ARE DIFFERENT FROM YOU!"

"Chat Noir," Papillion breathed.

"He's right, you know," a third voice came from the doorway. There stood Duusu in her human form, glaring at Papillion.

"C-Camille," Papillion stuttered.

"All this happened because you hate those who are different from you," she continued. "You hated gypsies with all your heart, so when you fell in love with one, the only logical thing to do was rape her. And then you had to curse her unborn child out of rage for creating another gypsy. So you went and paid another gypsy to put a curse on her, so she bore a son who looked like a half cat demon. And when she came to you, showing you the son you had together, you tried to have her killed, slashed her across the chest with your own blade," she pointed down at the sword at Papillion's side. "But you did not plan for me to live, did you?"

"Duusu?" Chat breathed.

"Anoher mistake I will soon remedy," Papillion hissed as he drew his sword.

Camille met his sword with her fan, blocking his blows as he pushed her out of the room.

"Chat Noir?" a hoarse voice called as Chat turned toward Marinette, who was rolled over on her side, trying to sit up.

"Marinette," Chat sobbed as he wrapped his arms around her protectively. "We have to get out of here," Chat said as the sound of Camille and Papillion's weapons crashing entered the little room they hid in.

Marinette wrapped her arms around Chat's neck as the two fled from the room.

Papillion saw the two escaping as he swung at Camille once more, "She lives," he gasped before ducking beneath her swing.

He pushed her aside and chased after them, Camille giving chase.

"You will not harm my son!" she shouted as she threw her fan toward the man's head.

Papillion turned and knocked the fan off course and toward the ground below with his sword. Camille was no longer armed.

Chat took the chance when Papillion was turned to climb over the edge and out of sight. "Hold on tight," he whispered as he used both hands to hold onto the building.

Papillion turned back to find the two gone. Camille tried to distract him by charging at him, only to be pushed back again from dodging the swing of his sword. Papillion looked over the edge of the balcony and spotted the pair hanging off the neck of a gargoye.

"Did you honestly think you could hide from me?" Papillion questioned as he swung at the two.

Chat swung out of the range of the sword and began to climb along the side of the church. Papillion took chase, swinging madly at the two each chance he got. His wild swings also kept Camille from getting close to him.

God Gave Me You

Once Chat and Marinette were a safe distance away, Marinette climbed up onto the balcony. Chat followed only to push her violently out of the way when Papillion took another swing at them.

Camille grabbed her and pulled her back to safety.

"How sweet," Papillion growled as he looked at each face, "Like a true family, caring for one another."

"You mock your own family before you," Camille spat, "You have been trying to kill your only son since the day you met him. Even now, you think you are justified in murdering him, his mother, and the woman he loves all for the sake of your dignity!"

"I have been sent by God to purge the world of the wicked! People like you," Papillion shouted at Chat.

Chat felt his body move on its own. His rage overtook him as he swung his bare hand at the blade descending toward him. In a flash of green and darkness, the blade shattered. Papillion dropped the hilt of the blade in shock. In a final desperate attempt, he took his cloak and threw it over Chat's face, blinding him. Chat grabbed at the fabric, pulling it from his head. In the scuffle, he pulled Papillion over the edge of the balcony.

Papillion grabbed at a nearby gargoyle for dear life. Chat lost his footing as well and had fallen over the edge of the balcony next to Papillion. Marinette reached over the edge and grabbed Chat's wrist, keeping him from falling.

Camille reached out her hand as close to Papillion as she could. "Take my hand, Gabriel," she whispered.

As his hands began to slip, he looked Camille in the eye and refused. The sound of his cloak and robes were the only sound

made as his grip finally gave and he plummeted into the flames below.

"Chat, please hold on," Marinette's strained voice pulled Camille from staring at where Papillion once was. "Chat..." Camille reached over the edge just as Marinette's grip slipped and Chat fell toward the fires below.

"NO!" They both cried out as they leaned over the edge.

They stared in awe as his body stopped moving mid-fall and was pulled inside the church. Nino had caught him from his fall. He had saved Chat's life.

Both women let out a sob as they ran to where the men were.

Chat gasped as he felt the solid ground beneath him. He looked up to see Nino grinning at him.

"Man are you lucky," Nino laughed.

"Why?" Chat returned the smile.

"To have a friend like me around," Nino puffed out his chest proudly.

Chat's smile only grew before grabbing Nino and giving him a bone-crushing hug.

"Chat Noir!" Marinette's voice echoed from the nearby stairway. Chat released Nino and turned toward the door where the two women emerged.

He caught Marinette in a hug as Marinette cried from joy. He then got to hug his mother for the first time in his life.

Even Nino started to cry.

The four made their way to the entrance of the church just as the sun was breaking through the clouds of dark smoke. Light streamed

through the delicate glass of the cathedral, illuminating everything in bright colors and shapes.

"They look like the colors of your people," Chat mused as he walked happily through the lights.

Marinette took his hand in hers as she followed him, "Our people," she corrected kindly.

Nino let out a laugh, "Well, I think it's time for me to go find one of *our* people and ask if she's free on Saturday," he straightened his shirt and held out his arms, "How do I look?"

"As your best friend," Chat said with a hand on his chin, "I say you look like you just came from one heck of a fight."

Nino beamed, "Perfect." And with that, he opened the doors to a crowd of cheering people.

"I think the people are ready to greet us," Camille smiled as she followed Nino out the doors.

Marinette walked into the line of bright sunlight created by the open door and looked back at Chat Noir, "Aren't you coming?"

Chat hesitated, "Th-this has been my home for twenty years," he whispered as he stepped out of the light and into the shadows once more, "I don't know if the people are ready to see me."

Marinette stood next to him in the darkness and took his hand, "Chat," she began, "I have seen a lot of cruelty in this world. And there may never be an end to it," she smiled as Chat frowned at her, "But what is important is that you live your life knowing who you are and ignoring what the rest of the world thinks you should be. If they think you are a monster, let them think that way. If they think you are a human, let them think that way. If they never call you by the right name, correct them and move on. Just remember that I am here with you and I will love you with all of my heart regardless of what the

world says you are. You have so many people around you who think that: Camille, Nino, Alya, me, Archdeacon Fu, my family, Alya's family, our people, we all love you just the way you are."

Chat felt his face grow deep red, "I-I," he stuttered, "I love you too, Mari. And I want to be with you forever. I want to be with everyone else and not be afraid. I want to stand by your side just the way I am. I am a human, a complete and total human. And there is no one in this world who can say otherwise."

Marinette wasted no time, she took his face in her hands and kissed him right there. Chat felt his whole body tense at the intimate touch, but soon melted into her embrace. He grabbed her by the hips and spun her around in the air with a laugh, breaking the kiss. Marinette giggled as her feet touched the ground again.

His smile disappeared when he looked into her eyes. She was staring at him, eyes wide and mouth agape.

"Wh-what is it?" he asked, fearful that he had done something wrong.

Marinette reached up carefully and touched the top of his head, "Your... ears... and your eyes..." she turned him around suddenly and then back forward again, "and your tail!"

"What about them? Are they in need of grooming?" he laughed nervously as he lifted his hand to the side of his head only to see that his claws were also changed.

"You look..." Marinette breathed as she tried to process what had happened.

"HUMAN!" Plagg shouted as he burst through the doors with a shout. "The kid managed to lift the curse!"

"True love's kiss," Trixx winked, as she followed, "works every time."

"Are you lovebirds going to join the party or stay in here forever?" Alya shouted inside at them.

"Well," Chat shrugged as he walked toward the door, "No one wants to stay in here forever," he took Marinette's hand and walked into the sunlight.

"Chat Noir doesn't seem a very fitting name for you now," Marinette laughed as they neared the exit.

Camille stood beside the door, waiting for them, "I guess it's time to tell you the name I gave him," she smiled as she took Chat's free hand and pulled them outside. "Three cheers for Adrien and Marinette!"

"Adrien?" Chat laughed as the crowd cheered for the pair.

"I like it," Marinette complimented as the two walked toward the crowd, "mysterious and sexy at the same time."

Adrien laughed, "Fitting for the mysterious bell ringer of Notre Dame?"

"Fitting for the man I love," Marinette added as she gave him another kiss on the cheek.

"You two are so gross," Nino drolled as he swung an arm over Adrien's shoulder, his other arm around Alya's waist.

"You just wish you were as smooth as me," Adrien mocked as music began to play and dancers began to dance.

"Why? I already got the girl," Nino smirked as he motioned with his head toward Alya, who only laughed.

"No," Adrien corrected, "I got *the* girl. She's Ladybug, the finest dancer in all of France."

Marinette joined Alya in laughter as the two continued to argue over which of the two friends was better.

And with that, they lived happily ever after.